TALES OF THE AFRICAN WILD

F. W. DODD

Primitive Methodist
Missionary Society

to

Leslie Bacon

for

Collecting Cards

for

the Society

Jany 1918

T. J. Martin

(Minister)

A GLITTERING KNIFE FLASHED IN THE FETISH MAN'S HAND.

TALES

OF THE

AFRICAN WILD.

By FRED W. DODDS,

of Southern Nigeria,
West Africa.

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TO THE MEMORY OF

ANNIE,

MY SISTER,

LATE OF THE NATIVE GIRLS' INSTITUTE, JAMESTOWN,

WHO, FOR CHRIST'S AND AFRICA'S SAKE,

LAID DOWN HER LIFE AT CALABAR,

ON OCTOBER 9TH, 1911,

THIS BOOK

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

The following stories of African life might be divided into two parts, the first seven being labelled 'Possible Tales of the African Wild' and the last six as 'True Tales' for they are founded very closely on fact. But all hold together in this that sensationalism has been avoided in order to present in as unprejudiced a manner as possible some of the outworkings of native psychology. A careful student will be able to see how closely that psychology is wrapped up with the 'bush' environment, depending on it for its special forms and power.

Warm thanks are due to the editor of the 'Aldersgate' for permission to reprint these stories with the exception of 'Etim the Singer.' For that the author offers his best thanks to the editor of the 'Primitive Methodist Leader.'

F. W. D.

April 3rd, 1914.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

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TALES

OF THE

AFRICAN WILD.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE GRIP OF NIGHT.

FROM far across the tops of the great trees night had come with such suddenness that it was as if it had leaped upon the weakening day and smothered it. All nature lay still and calm beneath its great bulk. Never a breath of air even stirred, and the long palm-leaves hung drooping down, as though utterly unable to bear up beneath the heavy atmosphere. Only the insects seemed to enjoy the depression of the night, for they alone moved briskly, crickets chirrupping by thousands in the grass, fireflies executing their

lively dances in the bushes, while great beetles boomed noisily on their nocturnal way.

The blackness beneath the compound roof was impenetrable save where, here and there, a fire flared up as some one re-arranged its fuel. It was hot, too, so hot that the boys rolled their naked bodies in the sand of the open courts for coolness, mindful always to keep just within range of the fire-light. The menfolk lolled languidly on the long bamboo seats, while the women crouched over the cooking-pots or moved stately about in their preparations for the evening meal. Sundry dogs snuffled lazily among the rubbish of yam and plantain peelings and fish scraps around the fires, and then, from sheer languor, rolled over on their sides and lay stretched, or rather sprawled, as never English dog lay.

The Englishman seated at the end of one of these compounds loosened another button of his shirt, gravely smiled on the scene, then turned, as listless in movement as the

rest, and drew a drink from the syphon at his elbow.

'Heavens! What a country!' he gasped, as he drew his hand across his perspiring forehead. 'Fancy leaving old England for this! 'De bug, de bear, and de bumblebee, dar's one more ribber for to cross.' Well, we've got the first and last if not the others: bugs and rivers —and 'squitoes! Brute!' he ejaculated, hastily slapping a mosquito that would fain have feasted on his arm. 'Wonder if there's any good in this dog's life! Two days in this filthy compound, nothing to see but negroes and bush, and after that, bush and negroes! Nothing to read but—that!' He flung a book on to the bed behind him. 'Life of Queen Elizabeth! I'm sick of her, though, come to think of it, she liked a jaunt as well as the next. But there! she didn't tear around in black man's land, worried to death for carriers; tramp, tramp, tramp, all day long in a furnace, or steeping her limbs in muddy swamps, and finishing up for the night—here!'

He looked around again. Everything maintained the same attitude as far as the heat would permit. The boys rolled restlessly on the sand. A dog occasionally rose to snuffle once more among the refuse. A fearsome odour of damp rot and decay pervaded the whole atmosphere. The noise of the myriad crickets cut shrilly through the air like the tearing of a thousand linen rags. The very fire had lost the charm imputed to it by many travellers, for its presence seemed but to aggravate the burden of the heat.

'What a country!' the white man muttered again. He gazed on the row of stolid faces of the men reclining upon the benches. 'And what a people! Augean stables! Who can cleanse them? Puzzle of the sphinx! Who can solve it? Samson's riddle! How shall sweetness come out of this ignorance that holds them? Eh, but it's a dreary business—a dreary business! Like a lot of insignificant 'squitoes trying to bite through this tough-skinned paganism. Look at that now!'

'*That*' was a little bush growing in the middle of the yard, neatly fenced in with a circle of gin-bottles, and accumulated relics of many years' feasts held in honour of the household spirits. The last of these orgies had not long since taken place. A fowl's head in advanced decay still hung in the cleft of a stick at a height of three or four feet, and in the glow of the firelight, numerous egg-shells stuck about the tree shone up dingily. Strips of gaudy rags, frayed at the edges, mauled and dirty, hung from the branches straight and still in the calm air. A few small earthen vessels containing remnants of baked yams (the dogs had long since eaten the fish that had been with them) lay at the foot of the little tree. 'That' had decidedly an eerie look in the firelight, strongly reminiscent of the trees of fairy tales on which grow all manner of strange things. Or rather it reminded the man of that class of growth, for this was a tree of hideous fruits, set in no fairyland, but demonland. 'I don't wonder at their belief in evil spirits and

such things. If *I* had been born here I would have believed in them too. Take a night like this—no moon, creepy things everywhere, a waste of bush outside whose blackness on such a night makes one shudder to think of. How can an ignorant man help peopling it all with foul spirits? Some poor chap is taken suddenly ill in the night and dies. What has done it? Men gaze fearfully on one another, and then peer out into the darkness. Some bird screams in the distance, or a monkey in a leopard's grip. Their teeth chatter in their heads. It is the cry of the demon! They tom-tom and shout themselves mad lest it should return. Or some old soul is afflicted with a running eczema or a foul abscess of the breast and becomes a sight hideous to behold for very rottenness. No one lives with her, and her lonely ways are associated with shady dealings. Her very affliction is the result of too close contact with the spirits. The spirit of prophecy falls on the town Elisha. Next time a witch is wanted it is she! Oh, ay, it is very understandable, and all very wearisome!'

He shifted uneasily in his seat. A rustle of paper sounded in his pocket, and he pulled forth a letter and read it by the light of a single candle stuck in the neck of an old sauce bottle. For a time he read in silence. Meanwhile the negroes in the yard began to crowd to the cooking-pots. They squatted on haunch or heel around them, and dipping their hands into the greasy, smelly mess fairly gobbled down the food with huge lip-smackings and finger-suckings, amidst a rising babel of chattering. The boys hung round the outskirts and received handfulls liberally from the men. The raucous voices attracted the young missionary's attention, and the pure animalism of their feeding grated upon his sensitive nerves, until it almost brought a wail from his lips. He turned again to his letter. 'Here's from a college chum,' he groaned. 'Good times, full-up meetings, willing helpers, and all that, and here I sit—with these! Ah! but I feel I could preach if I were in his place. But how can I preach to these? Just to feel week

by week the thrill of sympathetic congregations, to see the nod of the head, to observe the tense attention as one swings them up into some great argument, or leads them through some intricate description; to put one's finger on the pulse of their spiritual life, and advise them of its health or sickness; to carry them, with consciousness of their heart-felt assent, to the High Throne itself! But here! O God! how hard it is! Saving the negro! I wonder—is it wasted time?'

He stood up and stretched himself. The meal being over, most had left the yard. Slowly he disrobed, and lay down upon the bed. He could still see the red embers of the fire, and they attracted his continued gaze. A solitary boy crouched near them, and the dogs hungrily cleansed the cooking-pots with their tongues. A doze overtook the missionary—a kind of oblivion rather than sleep, for he still saw the embers in the yard. And with the doze came dreamings, and this was the manner of them.

The embers blazed fiercely into a lurid glare. The yard was filled with people. Strange figures danced and sang and yelled around the flames. In an inner circle moved a fetish man clothed in the strangest garb. A leopard skin covered his body, decorated at the girdle and the corners with bunches of leopard's claws, leaves, and other fantastic charms. He danced madly with the weirdest contortions of the body, now with lips hideously thrust forth until the salivary glands showed their dark markings; now with eyes rolling, head shaking, every muscle of the body freely quivering; again, with sliding, snaky motions gliding round the fire. All the time he uttered a fierce song-harangue, the burden of which seemed to be '*uwa*' (sacrifice). The word was uttered over and over again. Suddenly at the very height of the excitement a cry went up louder than ever. A row of noisy tom-toms roared from the surrounding verandahs. A naked girl, clasping her hands on her breasts in terrible fear, was brought forward, a glittering knife flashed in the fetish-man's hand, and—

The vision faded. It was again the still, hot night. He was awake. The present was once more around him.

But again the missionary dreamed :—The embers of the fire still lay yonder, but the yellow mud walls and low thatch had disappeared. Substantial mud-brick dwellings arose, pleasantly white-washed. The sultry night lay just as heavily on all. There was still a faint odour of damp rot. The crickets chirped and the beetles boomed just as noisily as ever. But the scene was more comforting. Clean-faced boys, picturesque in white singlets and coloured cloths, lay on a clean-swept yard. Then folk sat about with books or tools in the bright light of lamps. Tables, decently, if simply laid, stood beneath the verandahs. No rubbish heaps of fish-scraps and yam-peelings lay in the yard tempting filthy-feeding dogs. Through the aid sounded the first bell of the village night school. It was a scene from the age that has to be.

The missionary woke with a start to the full

knowledge of his surroundings. He yawned, kicked away his blanket, then gazed round the yard again. It was absolutely still. The one small boy left had long since retired. The embers had finished their glowing, but the candle still threw a fitful ray. Things did not seem quite so bad as they had been. He had seen visions of the Past, Present, and Future. Very dimly the past, for no mind can conceive the horrible cruelties of those days. Very dimly, too, the future ; for in like manner, no mind can conceive the beauty of those coming times. *Yet come they would!* He blew out the light and turned upon his side.

'Guess I won't give this up just yet,' he said.

Then slept.

CHAPTER II.

THE TERRIBLE TWINS.

TOWARDS midnight the compound of Chief Asuquo Ote was filled with wild confusion. The Terrible had happened, and as if that were not enough, a greater terror had been added. In the stillness of the night, tribulation in the form of twin-children had come into his dwelling. A wail of bitterest sorrow had been wrung from the mother's trembling lips as she realised what had come to pass. And then, ere yet its thrill had died away, from out of the surrounding bush the roar of a prowling leopard had given awful answer back.

'Ekpe! Ekpe!'* shrieked the compound women, as they shrank, huddled, shuddering,

* "Leopard! Leopard!"

crouching into the darkest corner of the room. Beyond the thin mud walls they heard the snuffling of the great beast and could hear the soft padding of its huge feet as it passed slowly along. With dilated nostrils and wide open eyes, they pressed together the more, flinging their arms around each other in terrified embrace, 'Abasi O!'* moaned the wretched mother, 'Eka-Abasi O! kpeme mi!' A wizened old hag, wrinkled in every inch of her almost naked body, flung a few savage words at her, bidding her hold her peace. The woman gazed at her with her large pitiful eyes and sank back, utterly exhausted.

In other parts of the compound, at the sound of that echoing roar, men leaped to their feet, shouting hoarse cries to one another. Wattle doors fell outwards with a swishing crash; men sprang for the tom-toms hanging from the rafters in the inner court; a fire-brand blazed in a dark corner, and soon the din of the noisy drums bellowed through the darkness of the

* "O God! O mother's God, protect me!"

night. A huge fire blazed in the middle of the yard, and the drummers sat around, beating with might and main, hand and foot. The glare lit up their palpitating muscles and shining skins, down which the perspiration ran in streams. It revealed their faces stricken with fear; it shone past them dimly on the wildly contorting forms of men who danced and shouted madly with a grim earnestness well-nigh appalling. Now and again a drummer would fall out from sheer exhaustion, but a dancer would leap in to take his place that the volume of sound should not abate. For two great evils had befallen them. Evil spirits were among them which must needs be driven away. And so in their songs they cursed the twins and the twins' mother, and besought the devil of the leopard to leave them in peace.

Meanwhile the women crept away one by one, casting furtive glances at the young woman who lay still and quiet with her babes beside her. The night had done its worst for her. Brought to bed on the one filthy grass-

woven mat that lay between her and the solid earth, pierced with the wild fear that her twins and the leopard had brought, nerves shattered by the cruel pandemonium of noise outside, the poor body had been unable to retain the worried soul. From awful wretchedness it had passed out into more awful mystery. The old hag was the last to leave. She approached the body and lifting one hand, dropping it hastily.

'The witch has gone with the leopard,' she said, and hastened away just as the dawn flung aside the cover of night, and pushed a white hand into the *eastern sky. As the light strengthened so waned the ear-splitting rattle of the drums.

Blear-eyed men stared stolidly at one another, and then broke into peal on peal of laughter. In the battle with the spirits they had prevailed. They slaked their hot throats with copious draughts of water, spirting it hither and thither from their parched mouths into the

* The metaphor here used is an exact rendering of the poetic idea behind the native Efik word, usenubök "—Morning.

dust. All was movement and life. Only in a little, dark, windowless room two babies lay piteously beside a still form, while without, Nature stood silent and calm in the breathless air, unmindful of sorrow and joy.

Chief Asuquo, munching steadily on his chewing-stick, sauntered round among his people, uneasy in heart. Stooping, he passed under the low doorway, and stood gazing down upon the quiet form. One of the babies lifted feeble hands and began to cry. He put his big toe beneath it and turned it on its face to deaden the noise. The other child was sleeping peacefully. The chief contemplated its features with loathing and dread. The curse of the Evil Spirits had fallen upon this house. The traditions of his tribe taught him that already good fortune had left him, for all the ju-jus of his house, all his medicines and charms were rendered impotent by the presence of these unhappy twins. All sense of fatherhood was obliterated by the crushing fear of the evils that might result. His one

longing was to be well rid of mother and offspring.

'Akpan! Udo!' he cried at last, calling two of his men by name. 'Give this woman to the river, lest her body be a curse to my house. And go, call the fetish-man, that he may make powerful medicine and learn for us what shall be done with these evil children!'

Soon a long canoe shot swiftly between the mangrove-walled banks of the creek, and ere long returned, driven hard by panic-stricken men who had deposited their burden beneath the slatey waters of the river. With measured dignified step the old fetish-man strode through the winding paths of the town until he halted before Asuquo's compound. Instant silence fell upon the gathered crowds as they shuffled uneasily out of his path. Slowly he advanced among them to the inner room, and as he entered a young woman, who, in the kindness of her heart, had so far conquered her fear as to give the babes her breast, dropped back into the darkness of the corner, and then made

good her escape. For a while the medicine-man sat gazing on the motherless mites.

'Bring goats,' he cried, 'and sheep! Bring many, and make sacrifice to the Ukponidem. Evil is this day for thee, O Asuquo! Hadst thou not called me thou wouldst have died, and thy chieftainship gone to another! Make fires, prepare oil and pots, for this day much blood must be spilt and the evil spirits satisfied with the life of sheep and goats!' A frenzy seized him. His eyes rolled hideously, his face was convulsed, his body writhed. 'Eka-Abasi visited me in dreams of the night!' he chanted. 'She said her grove had not been visited; the sacrifices of motherhood had not been paid. Long had she waited at the sacred trees, but this woman came not and fed her not. Then had she risen in her anger and cursed this woman. She had caused her to be as the sheep and the goat that beareth always two and not one. Sacrifice, ye people; spill ye blood and give life that the anger of the Eka-Abasi be turned away, and she call off the spirits that would desolate your house!'

The fevered chant had its intended effect. Bleating, struggling, the sacrifices were brought and slain, drums began once more to resound, and the people ate the common feast with the angry goddess. Far into the next night the wild orgies proceeded, punctuated by excited songs from the fetish-man. Only in one black breast burned a spark of pity. Stealthily, hiding them in a basket, filled high with edible leaves, the girl who had previously fed them for her sister's, their mother's sake, removed the innocent children lest they too should be a sacrifice to the pitiless gods. Far into the bush she carried them, only halting when she reached the house of a native Christian teacher at a town some miles away. At his door she left them, running swiftly back lest her too long absence should be noticed.

As the second dawn swept across the sky with tropical speed Okon Itan, the teacher, sleepily drew open the door of his hut and gazed into the morning mist already rising slowly from heavy plantain leaves and en-

tangled bush growth across the way. A murmuring whimper at his feet drew his attention to the basket before the door. He pushed aside the obscuring leaves and stared aghast at the little foundlings. Instinctively he turned and shut the door upon them and the outcry they began to set up. In the serenity of the dark house he shuddered. Like a leaping torrent out of his dark heredity Dread caught upon him and almost mastered him. Separated from the blackest paganism by not even the thin wall of one Christian generation he was for the moment thrust from his feet. The influence of a thousand cruel superstitious ancestors flung him hither and thither in its grip. Had not his own mother been killed by his father for this offence of bearing twins? In his boyhood had he not, too, rejoiced and danced to see the twin-mothers thrust into the river to drown? What dark tales were those his people told of the strange fates of them who succoured such children as these! He panted in terror as imagination threw vivid appearances of aveng-

FAR INTO THE BUSH SHE CARRIED THEM.

ing spirits upon his mind. He suffered as no civilized Christian can understand. By a handful of years only the brutish past stood behind him, and its baneful influence poisoned the atmosphere of his soul. His new-born Christian spirit reeled in the thought of the terrors of his forsaken creed. He looked for help; he thought of the white man's God.

'Ete nyin, emi odude k'enyon,'* he burst forth. But so rapid was his frantic utterance that it caused no relief. For the moment the prayer had degenerated for him to a fetish incantation. He rose to thrust the evil children from his door, and as he rose in the dim morning light his eye fell on a gaudy picture of the 'Crucified.' 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out' stood forth in scarlet capitals beneath it.

A new turmoil began within. In the sweeping flood out of dark heredity in which he tossed he clutched at the feet of Christ. But yet the fierce onrush of the flood bade fair to

* 'Our Father which art in heaven.'

tear him away. The Savage howled madly at the Merciful, the Old struggled pitilessly with the New. Slowly, slowly, the Gentle overcame the Rough, the masterful Christ beat back the hordes of darkness. Slowly, slowly, the turmoil slackened in the lad's dark breast, the peace of a great stillness took possession of his heart. Slowly, slowly, Dread loosened its terrible grip, sank dumbly away defeated. In those few minutes Okon learned the marvellous lesson of Pity and Compassion, and braced himself to be a saviour too.

The whimpering began again outside. He pulled open the rude door, and with a smile drew in the cold, hungry little mortals to the warmth of his room.

From far away across the tree-tops drifted the sound of the thrashing of drums. Within their roaring circle lay dead she who had saved the terrible twins.

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN'S LOT.

'ADET O!' The raucous voice paused a moment. No answer came. 'Adet Adiaha O!'

A well-developed girl of some fourteen years emerged from the door of a dark room into the sunlight of the courtyard. She rubbed her dazzled eyes a moment or two before discovering the disturber of her siesta. A thick-lipped negress stood at the far end of the yard with a dish of food, holding it forth to the advancing girl. Adet lazily took it and turned over its greasy contents with her fingers. Bits of yam and plantain, dried fish and shrimps, floated about in a sea of yellow oil. Contained as it was in a dirty old calabash, it looked a filthy mess. Adet put it on the ground and muttered

that she did not want it, her thick lips pouting out monstrously.

'Adet, you must eat it!' protested the mother. She stuck a finger in the pulpy stew and greedily sucked it. 'See! it is good! Onen Ude, your betrothed husband has sent it. Truly if you eat not when you go forth on the morrow to exhibit your fatness in the town you will be lean of stomach, and all men will mock you, and me, and your husband. They will say, 'Behold here is one who has sat in the fattening room three months, and yet she is thin as a serpent. Her bones stick forth like the rips of a fish-trap. Either her husband feeds her not, or her parents eat what he sends her, or she is like the foreign cats which eat but fatten not.' Come now, Adiaha my daughter, eat and praise Onen Ude.'

For answer a greasy, yellow mess spread over the floor. As Adet tipped over the bowl with an angry kick she cried, 'I won't! I hate Onen! I do not wish to marry him! I will run away! I will not grow fat for him!'

The mother gazed in consternation first at her rebellious daughter and then at the scattered food. A lean dog and her troop of hungry pups were already nosing eagerly for dainty scraps among it. The woman picked up a stick and drove them yelping away. Then turning on Adet, she belaboured her soundly, pouring out such a flood of vituperation the while as could be heard in the compounds over the way.

'You idle whelp! You child of devils! Cursed be the day I bore you! Sorrow and trouble only do you bring me. Give your husband's gift to the dogs! A dog you are yourself! May evil rend you! The curse of Abasi be upon you! Thus do I flog you, thus do I make your skin as though leopards had clawed you. Begone to your room, evil one! Onen shall tame you, you cub of disobedience!'

Cowed, cringing, frightened, the girl fell back before the onslaught of stick and tongue, and flung to behind her the thatched shutter of the door. Muttering volubly and bitterly,

THE GIRL FELL BACK BEFORE THE ONSLAUGHT OF STICK AND TONGUE.

the mother gathered up the spilled food, even scraping the very dust with her finger and wiping it on the edge of the calabash. Stick in hand, she stood over the shrinking Adet while she consumed it to the last drop, grit and all.

Left to herself the girl stretched herself languidly on a raised earthen bed.

From her earliest years Adet Adiaha had been made to realise that she was born to be married. For a girl life could hold no other fate.

As long ago as she could remember one vivid day still hung in her memory. A blaze of hot sunlight fell heavily from steely-blue skies on to the roofs and roads of Oduneni. It smote so fiercely that the outlines of trees and houses quivered and shook in its glare. Vegetation withered and stank, dogs and goats crawled panting into the shade; the birds sang not; only lizards and snakes and such sinuous reptiles seemed able to withstand the terrific heat.

Beneath her father's verandah a number of people were assembled. There was the old chief of her house, dirty, ancient, owlish of features, with hands talon-like in their crumpled skinniness, solemnly presiding. Around him, seated or standing, were relatives of all degrees, parents, uncles and brothers, of various ages and appearance. There was a stranger, too, bravely clad from gaudy cap down to his rich new cloth. Perhaps he was nearly as old as her father. His voice was very loud, and he laughed much, showing teeth that gleamed white like ivory in the shadows. Him she disliked and wondered why.

Then her mother had dragged her forward, and told her to show herself to this man, but she had cried bitterly, and hidden her naked little body behind her parent. The awful man laughed again, and began to talk about wives, goats, sheep, and presents. Then there had been a squabble—everybody talking at once, vociferating loudly and gesticulating profusely. Her own name was much men-

tioned. She was dragged about by excited disputants until her poor arms were bruised. After a time things quieted down. The chief stretched forth his rheumatic, screwed-up, claw-like hand, and pulled her forward. She dared not resist, for she feared him greatly.

'Adet!' said he, 'cease your weeping and pay heed to my words. This man would have you for a wife. He will pay large dowry, very great wealth to me, much treasure to your parents, and many presents among these members of our family. The dowry is good. The man is honourable. Will you agree, Adet?'

His owl-eyes searched her. Poor little mite! She saw menace and cruelty there such as a mouse may see in the eyes of a bird of prey. She cast one frightened little glance around. No pitying eye met hers. Her three-year-old mind was called upon to make the most momentous decision of her life. She hesitated, sobbed, nodded once, then broke away and hid herself in the darkest room of the compound, there to cry long and bitterly.

From that miserable day of her betrothal she had never seen this husband of hers for nearly ten years. Only her father would go away sometimes for days and return with goats or wives. The other girls of the town were like herself. On the way to the spring each morning and evening they would sing melancholy little songs of the husbands they would like to have. These songs turned entirely on their physical attractions. Love, righteousness, manliness, had no place in them, but only youth, strength, riches, and such things. The girls seemed never tired of them. Some of the bigger lasses had other songs, but Adet could not yet understand them.

Strange enough, Adet was not unhappy after that first day. Like a stoic she accepted the lot destined for her. There was no use for reasoning. It never occurred to her to reason. All girls married, therefore must she, was about as far as intellectual effort took her. The course of her life had been placid enough. Away in those back bush towns days came

and went, bringing no other excitement than an occasional feast and the weekly markets. Sometimes she saw the marriageable girls in all the pride of their fatness parading the town. She had even laughed to think that one day she also might sit at ease and eat and sleep the livelong day until the flesh of her back and limbs fairly hung in rolls and flabby masses of superabundant fat.

At last her turn came. Onen Ude arrived, older and more evil-looking than ever. He leered at her from his crafty eyes. With him were carriers bearing presents of cloth, gin, and other traders' wares, to bestow on parents and friends. For her he had brought brass anklets and gaudy silk cloths to adorn her. In the light of the moon there had been some feasting and a goat sacrificed to the Ete-Abasi, and the Eka-Abasi. Far into the night the drums had roared as dancing proceeded. And next day! She shivered on the earthen bed as she remembered it. She had been ushered

into the fattening room with all the secret, loathsome rites of her tribe.

So after those days she had sat here eating and eating, thinking little of the future, almost less of the present, save that it was all enjoyable, this leisure and idleness. But there had entered her this last week a spirit of discontent, which altered all these things. Among her more distant relatives was a youth who often visited her people. Many times had she spoken to him. He had even condescended to let her play the white man's game of draughts with him. He knew she was betrothed to Onen. But one day he said he hoped Onen might die. Curiously she had asked him why, and been told that then he would pay her dowry and marry her himself. She liked him very much. He had been present at the feast of entering the fattening room. He was still staying with her parents, and the other day, when all were asleep at noon, he had come to talk to her. When he went away she felt miserable. She knew not why. In their

country love had no high meaning. She did not know that her soul, bounding above the traditions of her tribe, had soared to realms of love. All she knew now was that she positively hated Onen and sought hungrily every hour for a glimpse of the other man. Hence her outburst.

Next morning her mother aroused her from sleep, bringing another mess of food. Also she carried raiment to adorn her for this great day in the midst of the fattening time when she should parade the town with a bevy of little maidens to exhibit to all how well she was thriving. Hours were spent that morning on elaborate hairdressing, her mother clipping and combing and parting her fuzzy curls as her head lay on her knee. Then a single cloth, depending from one shoulder to mid-thigh, was draped around her. It was very striking, a mass of huge red markings on a ground of the gaudiest possible yellow. Half a score of large brass anklets clanked noisily on each leg, and thus attired she walked from

house to house, her young attendants singing the praises of her parents and her prospective husband. At night, tired out, she returned. Onen had praised her, but his words were hateful. She sat on the floor of her room in a rage. Her real lover had gone away to his own home. Her eyes had searched for him all day in vain.

The instincts of love awoke in full force in her dusky breast. She would go to him whatever happened. Carefully she slipped off the noisy anklets and laid them separately in the corner of the room. Then, stealthily stepping over her sleeping companions, she crept out into the moonlight.

Past cocoa farms and yam patches she sped on, putting behind her ever more and more miles. Sometimes she heard pursuit as she thought and ran harder. But her fears were groundless. Long ere daylight she sank exhausted on the outer verandah of her lover's house and waited for the opening of the door. Poor foolish virgin! With the dawn came the

pursuers, and dragged her from her haven back to the hated fattening room. The dowry had all been paid. Onen had been an honourable man! She was now little more than the chattel of her husband, and none could take her away.

In the morning came the old chief, more owlish in appearance than ever, and berated her. As a judge he sat over the wretched prisoner, and had her chained to the doorpost lest she should escape again. Once only she heard news of her lover. Onen had visited him with a fetish-man, and shortly afterward he had died! Her parents brought his hand severed at the wrist and cast it down before her. Destiny circumvented her. Sobbing, she yielded to her parents' threats and promised to marry Onen.

As long as she dare she put away the evil day. But the days of feasting passed when she came from the fattening room. The long round of visits to relatives was finished.

Within three months she entered Onen's compound, mingling with his other wives, to drag out her existence amidst jealousy and wrangling and misery.

Once only she ran away. But only a little while. She went to place a dish of yams on the grave of her well-beloved.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRUGGLE UP.

EBURU, like most other bush-towns, lay wrapped under vegetation. Patches of houses showed up, dull brown in hue, through insignificant rents in the immense welter of green. The puniness of man's weak arm stood in stiff contrast with the gigantic force of nature. Palms and cotton trees lifted their heads high—very high—in disdain of the low huts at their feet. Big-leaved plantains, grasses, bushes, scrub, and ferns of multitudinous varieties crowded together, smothering the daylight beneath them, and persistently, arrogantly, riotously, attempting to possess the very paths and house-yards of the town.

It was the struggle of life's lowest orders with its higher. In spite of his apparent weakness, man held his ground and repulsed the insidious attempts of nature to overwhelm him in her cramping folds.

Eburu, too, like most other bush-towns, was feeling the lifting influence of civilisation. Gigantic growths of ignorance and false conceptions still flourished—flourished mightily. Baneful practices, rites and customs obsessed the people's minds, and shut out the light of fuller knowledge. But through gaps in the vicious smother of falsehood a few scraps of truth had made their appearance; thus, that freedom was better than slavery, law than disorder, peace than war, even-handed justice than tyranny. Even so already was begun a greater struggle than of man with nature, namely, barbarism with civilisation, darkness with light, death with life.

It was of some aspects of this deeper warfare that Nkari Eset, the head chief, was thinking as he sat in the shade of his verandah.

The day was exceedingly hot, and the town was silent in the hour of siesta. Men sprawled in the shade with outstretched limbs in almost ridiculous likeness to the gasping hens standing, beak agape and wings spread wide, catching what air they could. Nothing was to be heard save the indignant grunt of some would-be sleeper disturbed by a neighbour's attempt at conversation. Almost alone in his compound the chief sat thinking and whisking away the tormenting flies, which bit savagely even through his thickened skin.

For fifty years as boy and man Nkari had lived in Eburu. For the last ten of them he had held his supreme position by popular acclamation. The changes in these fifty years had been great. He remembered the time when there were no warriors like those of Eburu. As a boy he had watched the men pour through the stockade gates to the sound of the mighty war-drums and the shouts of the non-combatants, and had seen them return gory but triumphant with tales of slaughter

and destruction and leading women for wives, slaves for the markets, and prisoners for the feasts. Stout had been the stockades, the gates defended against sudden attack by spear-pits and poisoned spikes cast loosely in the grass. But long since had the fences perished, and the people went forth to war no more. Skulls no longer adorn his palisading. The art of spear and bow had vanished away.

And again in those old days—so sped his misty musings—great had been the power of the chiefs. Men bowed before them as to gods, ready to yield life itself at their demands. For the chiefs held right of life and death and property, and exercised it, too, in fantastic tortures and punishments. Often had he seen the victim of a chieftain's wrath carried out to the death-place. Many were maimed, others mutilated in indescribable ways, yet others blinded, eyes scorched out by blazing oil. Few overcame their sufferings. Festering they lay about the death-pits observed by scarcely any save the vultures waiting in the dead tree-tops

for life's last flicker to fail. Those *were* times of power. But now? Nkari grunted in dissatisfaction as he considered his weakness, the lack of respect shown to his high position, the rebelliousness, indeed, of the young men against his authority.

A sound of approaching booted feet aroused him from his reverie. He looked up and saw a little cavalcade approaching, a white man at the head of a line of carriers. Under the overhanging foliage the heat was immense. Though unburdened, save by the minimum of clothing, helmet thrust back from his brow, shirt open to the lowest button, knees bare beneath the khaki 'shorts,' the white man was in a state of profuse perspiration. It ran down his face and bare arms in streams, dripping from his jaw and wrist-bones. It gathered in great gouts in the hair of his chest, and dribbled thence to his belt, where it soaked his raiment as thoroughly as if he had forded a river. He looked, and felt decidedly uncomfortable. Opposite Nkari he stopped and dis-

covering him to be the chief, sought to rest under his verandah. Suspiciously Nkari admitted him, but presently left him, retiring to an inner room.

'The white man!' he muttered to himself. 'Cursed be the Mother that bare him, for by him I have all my trouble!' He took up his train of meditation again, but now with an added element—the white man!

Laboriously he traced all his loss of influence and power to the foreigner from over the seas. His hatred arose, and, with the negro's usual lack of perspective, concentrated on the one individual who sat so unsuspectingly under his verandah. In his narrow mind it gradually appeared to him that he would have stricken a tremendous blow for his people should he remove this one hated being from their midst.

Calling an attendant, he dispatched him with a drum to arouse the minor chiefs and summon them to a meeting in the palaver shed.

Meanwhile the white man sat placidly fanning himself under the welcome shade, and watching his cook prepare the mid-day meal. He was robust, clean-shaven, merry-voiced, a typical young coaster who had not yet given way to the despondency and irritability induced by the constantly sultry heat in older men. He gave the chief a cheery salutation as he passed out on his way to the big palaver.

'Isaiah!' he called presently, 'just hurry on that chop. Pass 'em quick. I die for hungry!'

'Yes, sah!' grinned back the sable cook.

'And, Isaiah, in the meantime, be so good as to rescue the remnants of my flour from that inquisitive quadruped.'

'Sah?' said Isaiah, startled.

'I say, make the goat take his head out of my flour-tin. Right! Thanks, Isaiah. Now pass chop!'

The discomforted goat, as the effect of two resounding smacks from the officious Isaiah,

leapt hurriedly along the path. But ere turning the corner, it suddenly darted off at right angles into some farm-land. Isaiah gazed after it apprehensively, then turned with a fear-stricken face to his master.

'Massa,' he said, 'let we go one time, leave dis town.'

'What's the matter, then, Isaiah?'

'Massa, I not like this place. Dese people no do proper fashion. Dat chief, he no compliment we proper; he pass out, go for town; he make big palaver. You hear dat drum, sah. He call all chiefs, make palaver. He tell man for watch we. Dat goat, he go, run, den he jump for side and go for bush. Man do stand behind dat tree, he look we too much. Massa, let we go. I t'ink they make big trouble.'

'Pooh, Isaiah,' said the white man, laughing. 'War palaver not live now. What for they touch us? Pass chop now, quick, savvy!'

'I pass, sah,' complied Isaiah, far from heartily.

Dismissing all thought of danger, the white man made a peaceful meal, little understanding the faint hum of speech from the distant palaver-shed.

There, on the same old site where for hundreds of years the Eburu chiefs had sat in Council, the wise men of the town had gathered. It was a low, long building, the roof supported on tremendous pillars over two feet in thickness. Inside an unbroken earthen seat ran round the whole length of the walls. A huge log lay across the open end of the shed. The farther end was almost in darkness. Only the fogged outline, enclosing now a gleam of eyeball or flash of teeth, showed the face of Nkari. Before him stood and sat the minor chiefs, and around, thronging the whole shed, the young men pressed themselves. Not that they had any right there. It was part of the sign of modernism that they should hate the town's great affairs to be settled save by popular consent.

At first every tongue wagged vigorously. A pandemonium of noise rose and fell back from the low roof. But soon Nkari stood up and called loudly for silence. Instantly it was procured, and men stood to hear the cause of their gathering. Nkari's ruminative mood was still on him and reflected itself in his speech.

'Friends and townsmen!' he cried, in true oratorial style, standing there straight and dignified as an Antony addressing the Romans. His lean jaw rose and fell in the thick gloom with a constant flash of teeth. 'The wise men of our fathers truly told us that the backs of snail and tortoise are alike. They made it a proverb amongst us. But I look, and, behold, we have put our heads under the shell of the tortoise, and great, therefore, is our trouble. For lo! how the white man devours us up, who are good as he! From over the great waters he comes in his smoking ships. Strong are his ju-jus beyond the ju-jus of our race. They sit in the fire which is too strong

to overcome. By fire he journeys on the sea, by fire he slays both birds and men, by fire he makes all weapons and working things. He creeps across our land, and lo, we are eaten up! Our hearts shrivel within us as by fire, our power consumes away, the things our father's did are gone like smoke before him.

'For, behold, strong were our hands and hearts to fight when I was young. Our warriors knew not fear, but went forth with shouts of courage and took many towns, beating down their stockades, slaying their men of war, and bringing back spoil and captives for feasting and profit. But now we do so no more. We are mocked and spat upon by our foes. They pass by our town, and cry, saying, 'Aha, where now are they who fought? For fear of the white man they sit like old women within the houses. They no longer make themselves strong with the spirits of the prisoners they did eat. Their food is fu-fu, their drink the drippings of the eaves.

'And bend ears to me, O ye chiefs of Eburu. The father of my father, and your ancestors likewise ruled this town with the shaft of a spear. All men bowed before them, and gave unto them great names at which they trembled. They held their seats of judgment in their houses and got much wealth by fines and punishments. They slew the guilty by many deaths. But where now is the tree of crucifixions? Did not the white man hew it down and blow up its root with his cursed fire? Where now are the flesh-pits and the strong devils that lived in the vultures we fed thereby? Where are our sacred houses, full of skulls, our witch doctors, our religious rites? Truly the white man hath made them to flee and we sit impotent among our people, the taunt of our youths, the bye-word of our wives

'Yea, ye wise men of Eburu, truly hath the snail and tortoise backs alike, but the snail hath yet been devoured of the tortoise. And lo! as I thought bitterly on these things, there came a white man, whose family be cursed for

ever and ever. The dust tells not of it when one is put beneath it. Shall we not rise together and slay this man and all who are with him? Dead already is the white ant that creeps into the black ants' nest. Even the pale moon is lost among the dark clouds when the tornado blows. We have hatchets, we have guns, let us dare to kill. Behold, I have spoken!'

Words can hardly describe the furore of excitement that followed Nkari's bold address. Swept like leaves in a gust, men whirled about in mind in absolute uncertainty as to where they would eventually settle. Amidst the clamour of tongues old men arose and called for silence, and lashed out hot words, full of reminiscence of the past, and scorn of the present. They orated, gesticulated, vociferated until the sweat poured from them and the veins of temple and neck swelled into knotted ropes. Barbarism, long-repressed and kept in its place by a few civilised ideas, struggled like a tide on a shore to break its bounds. To

THE NONCHALANT WHITE MAN STOOD IN THE DOORWAY.

revert to the old figure, riotously, arrogantly, persistently, it attempted to repossess the thin paths and narrow clearings civilisation had made in its midst.

Messengers sent out returned to say that the white man was preparing to depart. Louder rose the speeches, more strenuous waxed the oratory. But the wiser of the young men abruptly opposed it all. With jibings and ridicule they spurned the selfishness of the chiefs. They spake of such things as law, trade, peace, security of life and property, freedom, education, training, and much else the white man had brought in his train. In fact, they drew definitely the line over which barbarism might not step by reiterating, though not in so many words, the few truths of civilisation they had been able to absorb, that peace is better than war, law than disorder, even-handed justice than tyranny, education than ignorance.

'Afia owo!'* screamed a youth at the door.

* White man.

All eyes turned. The nonchalant white man stood in the doorway trying to make out the faces of those inside. For a moment he looked round, then laughed merrily.

'Mesiere!'* he shouted, and strode away whistling a popular song, or one that was so before he left home.

'Mesierende!' roared the young men and tumbled out to see him safely out of the town.

The chiefs remain a little while seated around their head, silent and disgusted, then stalked off each to his house. Again the apparently weaker had conquered the stronger. Barbarism still flung high its head in proud disdain, but underneath, the clearings still existed, and would grow and bite deeper yet into the thick mass of vicious practises that still limited the new time of light and life, of knowledge and God.

* Farewell. Note.—In January, 1911, the writer heard exactly the sentiments of Nkari's speech from a band of chiefs in an Ibo town.

CHAPTER V.

THE WIFE SLAVE.

IN the evening time when the air was pleasant, the men of Oquat used to stroll out to visit friends and relatives in the compounds. Thus it happened that Nderi, twanging a small native dulcimer as he walked, dropped in one evening on his friend Nyun Abam. Seated sociably, lazily, on a bamboo seat, they discussed together palm-wine and all the small gossip of the town, interspersing their vigorous and noisy conversation with raucous sniggers and loud guffaws that startled even the puppies at their feet. In the unusual event of a lull in their talk Nderi played lightly on the thin bamboo reeds of his instrument, producing music of a notation unknown to

ordinary composers, full of quarter as well as semi-tones. The effect was mournful like all native music. Nderi did not notice that, but meantime let his gaze wander round the yard, taking in its movement and life.

The shadows were already well-nigh black under the wide verandahs. The light of a fire flickered dully from one of the open doorways. Occasionally women passed in or out, or too-curious dogs hastened into the open to 'ki-yi' their base treatment to the fading light. Then Nderi laughed, and picking lumps of dried mud from a crumbling patch of wall, would hurl them after them, and this would open again the flood-gates of talk with his friend Nyun Abam. During one of these silences Nderi noticed a young girl helping in the preparation of a meal. She was tall and slender, for her ten or eleven years, with long, graceful limbs, and upright back, moulded by the daily toil of carrying the huge water-pots on her head up the steep hill from the spring. Her face, in profile against the fire-lit doorway,

was regular enough for a negress, brow, nose and lips not exhibiting the negroid characteristics too nakedly. Nderi looked upon her with approval.

'You have never yet betrothed your daughter?' he questioned of Nyun Abam.

Abam grunted a sour negative. Nderi remained silent, twanging gently on his instrument and narrowly observing his friend. That individual fidgetted uneasily, knowing an explanation was expected, and looked nervously about the compound. By-and-bye he arose, and beckoning his companion, led him to a darker and more remote corner. Nderi followed, wondering at his move, dangling the dulcimer from his wrist by a string. In the corner Abam seated himself, and after a pause began to speak in a low voice.

'Many men have praised my daughter,' said he, 'and have said her dowry should be great, reaching many goats and cows, even to ten thousand wives. And for that price have some offered to take her to wife. But always her

mother, who is third among my wives, opposes me, and says she shall not yet be betrothed until she can choose her own husband. The white God-palaver man has wrought me great evil by his teaching, for it is he whom my wife obeys and not I. For him she worships no more the spirits of our people, nor does sacrifice to them. For him she goes not to trade and sell in the markets on every seventh day. For him she makes my sons and daughters go to the house of the book when I would they should plant my farm or paddle my canoe. Sorrow sits hard upon me, and I know not what to do. For if I beat her she ceases not to do the things I have said, and if I threaten her with the woes of our ju-jus, behold, she laughs. Yes, I have said that I will marry my daughter to whom I will, and, lo! she says, 'Then will I even leave your house and people.' To that I cannot agree, for does she not earn much money, trading better than all the other women of my house? Does she not make my food agreeable to my palate, cooking better than

any other? Does she not bear me many children to increase my family and my name among all the people of Oquat? Truly, Nderi O, I stand as a goat between the river and the crocodile. If I go this way I get much trouble, likewise the other. If I betroth not my daughter I lose many wires and much substance, and if my wife should run from me then I lose yet more. Truly I know not what I shall do.'

Nderi heard the whispered harangue in silence, save for an occasional minor chord dropping as by accident from the bamboo reeds as his fingers lightly picked them.

'I will tell you what you shall do,' he said at length. 'Does not the leopard steal its prey by night, when all men sleep? So shall you do. You shall secretly receive a price for the girl from some man of a distant country, and, when all things are ready, you shall cause the girl to sleep alone, and I will come in the midnight and take her away. Then shall you tell your wife that the slave-dealers have stolen her. And you shall put to her this parable,

that, as new pots are more to be coveted than old, so, because your daughter is a virgin and unbetrothed, the slave-dealers much desired her. Does not the hawk also swoop and gather the chicken that has no protection? Even thus as hawks the slave-dealers swooped on her who had no husband. And you shall scold your wife and beat her, and tell her you may not pursue lest you should be killed. Then will she forget, and your troubles will cease. Understand you me?'

Abam peered about a little in the darkness before answering, then said, 'It is good!'

For a little time they discussed the details of the plan, and then Nderi retired through the night, the melancholy twang of his instrument trembling in the air long after the soft shuffle of his feet had died away, and finally mingling in the piercing shriek of the myriad crickets in the grass.

Months passed away before all things were ready. Abam made long journeys to distant

markets, introducing everywhere the topic of his girl. At last a man was found willing to buy her outright, and never let her be heard of more.

Thus it happened that just at the height of the rainy season, and in the dead of night, when all small noises were drowned in the steady, heavy swish of the rain through tearing leaves and on to rustling roof mats, when darkness almost impenetrable covered the movements of all stealthy night-wanderers such as Nderi, that negro, groping under the verandah of Abam's yard, slowly slid back the bamboo door leading to the girl's room. Feeling with his hands along the floor before his feet he presently touched the sleeping child's shoulder. One hand felt instantly for her mouth, but in the darkness mistook the direction and fell heavily on her breast. Loud above the sound of rain, now beginning to cease, rang the frightened creature's scream before Nderi could muffle it with his palm. Scuffling, blundering, stumbling, he pulled the

STUMBLING, HE PULLED THE CHILD FORTH.

child forth in headlong haste. The bamboo door fell with a crash and the girl caught her shin on it, cutting a gash an inch long. A light began to flicker and grow more clear between the chinks in the mother's door. Nderi saw it, and for one moment in his haste to be off, released his hold on the daughter's mouth. She bit his finger deep to the bone, and sent another scream trembling through the night air. The rain had stopped. The stars stood silent in their sentry places, no breath of wind stirred, all Oquat slept profoundly in the deep hush.

'Eka mi O!'* The shriek wailed up into the silence like the cry of a wounded leopard cub.

'Eyen mi O!' † the answer came back gruff and concerned as the growl of the angry leopardess.

But Nderi, fiercely pinching the girl for the sake of his wound, dragged her on through the outer door and into the night; on, past com-

*'O my mother!' †'O my child!'

pounds where awakened sleepers were questioning one another as to the cause of the disturbing scream; on, across the open space by the palaver shed, where the great drums, too ready to speak in honour of cruelty and bloodshed, would have no voice for this frightful wrong; on, through the stream down which many a canoe had shot with its load of such like human woe, bearing its crowd of miserable slaves; on, past his own house and the outer houses of the town into the dark bush-paths. He dared not stop, for behind in the town the fierce voice of the mother calling her child rang out in the night. He could only hope to make the next big town by daylight. There he could hide with his charge and travel again in the night.

Meanwhile in the compound the woman ran crazily from room to room, searching for her missing daughter. Lights began to glimmer here and there, people talking, bellowing, confusing one another and her by the variety of their views. When it was indubitable that the

girl was gone, the mother collapsed on the floor, and, seated there, set up one long interminable wail, and could not be stopped or comforted until it had run its course. Then, the emotion changing, she sprang to her feet and called loudly for Abam. The hero came from his skulking-place, and, standing before her, began his tale of slave-dealers as Nderi had instructed him. But when he spoke of the hawk swooping to its prey she stopped him with a wild cry.

'But ever the old hen is the protector of her chicks, and will fight even the hawk for her young. Sit down and beat fu-fu, and suckle children, you child of cowardice! I will go forth alone for the girl.'

Capable, like all her people, of sustained excitement for hours, she ran shouting and wailing, hither and thither making her preparations. At break of day, while yet the glimmer of dawn lay like a faint wash of silver in the far east, she was ready to start. Moving round the verandah she saw the blood from

the girl's bleeding leg. The spirit of her ancestors leapt into a living force at the sight. In that moment she was a possessed creature. She rolled on the ground screaming and tearing at her perspiring body with clawing nails, then, rising mud-smirched, dishevelled, stood gazing intently at the spots of blood. The compound folk tried to hold her, but, like a wronged leopard-mother she shook them fiercely off, and ran crying through the door down the trail of blood. Spot by spot she followed it with running feet past the compounds, where the people slept once more, by the palaver shed with its drums grimly silent and aloof, across the stream witness before of many a like heart-broken mother, out of the town into the far bush-paths. The sun began to get higher, traffic increased, the dust of the path was kicked over the bloodstains. Only now and then a smear on the grass-blade, a gout or two on a fallen stick, caught her roving eye.

Mile after mile passed thus. The blood had begun to congeal in the girl's leg, and only an

occasional oozing drop where Nderi had pushed her to a greater speed, showed the road. Then came a wide swamp. Down, down, led the path, steeper and steeper, water-torn, overgrown with tree-roots, where a slip meant broken limbs; down into places where mud and water eternally brooded among high overhanging vegetation where even the crickets screamed not, and silence and stillness hung in the hot, damp air. The path lay along a narrow stream bed, three or four feet deep in mud and water, with holes full of mud of unknown depth, where she must step from greasy tree-root to greasier, rolling, rocking logs that squelched and set up spattering sprays of mud and swarms of bugs that bit and tormented her hot, sweating face. Still the winding, squirmy paths led on. The stink of the mud of ten thousand years' accumulation hung heavy around; her hands, face, limbs were a slimy grey with it; blood stood where sharp-edged leaves had whipped her. But the blood merely kept alive the spirit within, reminding her of

that other blood. Gasping, muttering, she struggled on down to the clear water in the swamp's centre, and then on to the distant edge and up once more to the flat lands high above.

She knew where she was going now. This path led but to one town. No need to look for blood! Anyhow the mud had effectually sealed the wound so that it bled no more. At mid-day she stood on the edge of the town, where she hoped to find the girl.

'Slave-dealers?' To her enquiry none had seen any such that day. The women rose listlessly from their occupations to look at this intruder on the town's peace. They threatened to push her out if she did not hold her noise. But through a compound wall as she passed she suddenly heard a voice wailing.

'Eka, mi O!'

'Eyen mi O!'

The leopard-heart of her leaped. Darting through the door, she tore at the fastening of

the child's room. Nderi rose from a seat near by where he had been sleeping and came to prevent her. Looking up she knew him, and the spirit of her ancestors flared in her again. With a scream of rage she sprang on him, and, bearing him to the earth, fastened her nails again and again in his rent face in a glut of wrath. Leaving him dazed, moaning, scarified, she again assayed the door, this time with success, pulled her daughter forth, and fled.

On the Sabbath she stood before her pastor and told him all the tale. He listened gravely. Rigid doctrine told him such passions were sinful, such revenges severely to be dealt with. But he knew the heart before him.

'Neither do I condemn thee,' he gently said. Then under his breath as she moved away, 'Go, and for the sake of Afric's trodden womanhood God send us in his grace ten thousand such, ready to do the same!'

NOTE.—In March of this year (1912) the writer heard a somewhat similar case to the preceding gone through in the District Commissioner's Court. The facts occurred in February last.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNKNOWN.

THE Asawun country was notorious, chiefly for miserable roads, and a long way after for apparently utterly depraved natives. Government men detested the station with almost unrelieved hatred. Whites who had spent their official year in its midst emerged with incredible tales of its abominable hills and valleys, its unredeemable people unrestrained by any fear of punishment from crimes unheard of elsewhere, beside which ordinary cannibalism paled into whiteness. They spoke of religious rites wherein folk were devoured before their own eyes, pieces of flesh being cut from their limbs and swallowed raw and quiv-

ering before them, of crucifixions accompanied by frightful tortures, of slow roastings alive, of murders for no purpose whatever, but from sheer depravity, of ghouls even who dug up dead bodies to devour them. The prison was full of the doers of such deeds and still there seemed no abatement.

Civilisation works by many means. Good, broad roads were being bored into the very heart of Asawun from the districts round about. One felt in walking along them that these twenty-foot-wide gashes across the green-hued face of the bush were doing good in the country —somehow. They would open up the ulcers, so to speak, like the cut of a doctor's scalpel, let out some of the badness and change the perverted energies of native life into the healthy forces of trade and travel. The country's paths reminded one too closely of the naturally burst-out channels of the sore, down which streamed the rotten pus of feuds, bloodthirstiness and war, to make fresh ulcers elsewhere. These paths were tortuous—evolved rather than con-

structed. Where town was at feud with town paths were naturally of secondary consequence, and lay always along the line of least resistance. Sometimes one happened to be an abrupt descent down a hill along the torn-up channel of a wet-season watercourse; sometimes it lay among farms, turning many corners and making few short cuts owing to the difficulty of passing among the long yam-bines; sometimes it detoured in a semi-circle round the head of a fallen tree rather than take the trouble to cut through it. There was no object in having straight, good paths among a people who had patience and time to travel as their forefathers had haphazardly led. These white men were surely crazy to want straighter, swifter roads.

The white man employed on the work was getting very sick of the Asawun task. For weeks he had been taking sights and levels, drawing in paths where the big roads were to follow. Not merely the heat exasperated him. Again and again his compass had led him to the brinks of deep defiles where the road could

not possibly be taken. He had to re-take all his observations on another route. This was galling, so different from the level lands of the Niger basin he was used to, where one drove right on by the compass cocksure of finding no hindrance in fifty miles. His negroes, too, like the paths, had a knack of finding the line of least resistance, usually the nearest tree-log where they squatted themselves any time after his back was turned. Then there was fever, bowling him over almost every other day. His temper suffered extremely and he cursed abundantly and frequently, roundly wishing Asawun and all it contained—barring himself—to a far hotter place even than it was.

At last it seemed to this irritated, fever-eaten Englishman that he must get out of it all somewhere. The Station lay twenty miles off. It was a day's journey, but society was there, limited to a couple of men, almost as disgusted as himself, but still, white. It would be very satisfying to blow off his pent-up steam in the presence of sympathisers. The thought of it

made his mouth water. He specially invented a brand-new string of curses to reel off on arrival. Usually of the bluff, out-speaking, joke-cracking, healthy-minded type, Asawun had crushed all that and left him for the time as morose as the biggest pessimist. It did that to most men. Another two miles and he would be off for a few days, leaving the negroes to get on with the work as best they could.

The new section led into one of the wildest spots in Asawun, right up the bottom of a narrow valley alongside a stream. The sides rose precipitously. Even the natives did not try to hang their terraced farms on the almost upright slopes. All was thick, dense bush, apparently not penetrated by man, black or white for a hundred years. Five days it took to advance those few thousand yards, the white standing ever at the heels of his sweating natives.

Chima was one of them—Chima, the son of Awori, one of the minor chiefs of Aruka. He it was who, pushing on a little ahead, burst

suddenly upon a curious sight. An outcrop of rock in the valley had prevented trees from growing for a considerable space around. But in a narrow cleft in the centre soil had gathered and one lonely tree had sprung up. That did not impress Chima, but the shape of it did. This tree, comparatively young, was more gnarled and twisted than the oldest veteran. Its trunk, shooting straight up for a couple of feet, had bent over until it almost touched the ground, shot upwards again for twenty or thirty feet, then re-bent once more like the back of a bracebit or fretsaw and then up to its leafy crown. There was no apparent accounting for it. It was not of the weakly climbing class of growth, but of the strongest, most perpendicular sort. It frightened him—this one lonely tree removed from a million others and twisted so. He burst back through the bush gesticulating and yelling loudly to his mates.

'What on earth ails that jabbering scamp?' bellowed the white man.

Nobody heeded. Only the most vigorous language restored order, for the shouting and cross-questioning had become universal. The white man forgot the incident. He was well accustomed to frequent bursts of stormy talk and squabbles among his people.

Next day they reached the clear space. The workmen gaped in dread and awe; the master even wondered. He strode across to examine the phenomenon, soon satisfying himself as to the nature of the freak. The tree trunk descended deep into the cleft, so far that when a tornado had struck the clearing the young sapling had not been able to bend before it, but under the terrific force of wind the fibres had been strained and wrung, and the head fallen over. Obeying nature's law, this had once more turned to the heavens. The strained fibres had stiffened and strengthened, and for twenty feet or more the tree had gone straight. Another natural calamity had overtaken it. The top had been stricken off by lightning or other means, all but a single branch, and it

was this branch shooting out at an angle of forty-five degrees that now formed the only crown. It was very curious, one of those marvellously odd freaks of nature hardly credible until seen. The white man left it at that and next day started for the Government Station.

But Chima was not so easily satisfied. He understood nothing of the dynamics of wind, let alone of those vagaries of Nature by which she sometimes distorts herself. Tornadoes never suggested themselves to him. With a younger tree they might have done, but not with this big, thick growth. His was a primitive mind, more childish than a child's, dwelling amidst all the fantasies and crudities of a purely savage imagination. It was thoroughly uneasy in presence of a common thing it could not understand. Fearing to look, his eyes yet fastened again and again on that bewildering growth, his mind spinning all the time. One solution only offered itself feasibly out of the chaos. *Spirits!*

HE STRODE ACROSS TO EXAMINE THE PHENOMENON.

The thought terrified him the more for if spirits, then what spirit? His mind passed over the whole category of spirits he knew. Chileke? He never descended to such tricks as this! Alezi? Alisi-ama? Kamalu? The Idi-idi? These Ibo deities belonged to the compound and not to the bush! Who then? Surely this was some Unknown, long haunting this little clearing, vengeful and strong to the point of a ferocity like this, that his ghostly hands could so devilishly bruise and twist this thick and living trunk! He trembled to think of what would happen to the man who would fall into that evil grip!

Again his mind staggered so that verily he almost died on the spot from terror. On whom was that clutch so likely to fall as upon him who had first disturbed the spirit's frightful playground? And was not he the man? Had not he first sprung upon that rock and entered that dread presence without preliminary ceremonies or sacrifice? Without more ado he dropped his work and fled, racing to put dis-

tance between him and that awful tree. A day later he presented himself at his father's compound in Aruku. The old man was versed in ju-ju practice and he would enquire of him. He found him sitting in the main porch of the house, looking strangely old and wise. Chima bowed before him, touching the ground with the tips of his fingers and offering greeting.

'Greeting, my son!' said Awori. 'What makes your face look old beyond your youth, like the withering of a man of many years?'

The tale was soon told. Awori listened gravely and silently. His mind contemplated all the philosophy of his race. He was very old, very practised in its lore. Once before, in his early youth, he had heard from a stray head-hunter of this marvellous tree. That hunter had fallen in the next raid. Truly the Unknown was pitiless and cruel. He spoke very tenderly to this son of his blood.

'My son, the spirits are strong and swift, and know not mercy except after great sacri-

fice. Long have I pondered as I sit here day by day, and I know not of any that have escaped save by great cost. Take goats and sheep and oxen and offer blood and life to the Unknown one. Take what you value most and bind it to his tree. Haste, my son, for time is short and the way is long. I have spoken.'

'It is good, my father,' meekly answered Chima.

He passed into an inner room and began to haul over his stock of treasures. They were not numerous but vastly strange; half-a-dozen goats' skulls tied on a cow's horn, a ju-ju he had had the previous year from the fetish man, a piece of real leopard-skin worked round with a frill of parrots' red tail-feathers which he used in the most elaborate dances, a small drum made from real human skin and plentifully caked with human blood about the woodwork, several other very queer odds and ends. All these he painfully and carefully considered, weighing merits and demerits. But the Un-

known was powerful, too powerful he felt to be appeased by these things. No, none of them would do!

He turned to the wall behind him. Many fantastic things hung there which he scrutinized closely. His eyes fell on a human skull. He remembered the woman to whom it had belonged. She was supposed to be a most malignant witch. Had she ever dealt with this Unknown? If so, would he recognise his ancient votary? If not, it was still a marvellous thing, this skull of hers. It had talked! It had thought! It, too, was a strange mystery. What offering better could he give?

Tied in a bundle he carried it away, along with money to buy animals, on his head, and next day stood again beside the rock. Carefully he made his preparations. Calling his workmates, they went off to the nearest market for goats and sheep and returned dragging them by strings, bleating and protesting. Also, they brought gin, palm oil, eggs and pots. In the late afternoon they were ready to begin.

A fire was lighted, sacrifices were killed and the skull plentifully sprinkled with blood. The life had gone to the spirit. Pots were set over the fire and all the flesh, even including the biggest entrails, put to boil in palm oil until passably eatable. Half the night they spent there feasting on flesh and gin. Then, in the blaze of the fire-light, Chima, bearing the mystic skull, approached the tree. A few lashings of creeper strongly secured it, and its grinning face and blood-daubed pate shone white in the firelight. Mystery was bound to mystery, the unknown to the Unknown. Somehow the conjunction seemed efficacious to Chima. His fear was gone. A few rotten eggs were broken and set up on sticks before the skull, and then an orgie of dancing and feasting began, lasting well into the next day.

Two days later the white man returned. After a while he strolled down to the clearing. Slowly he passed before and round the ju-ju, examining each part of the ghastly relic closely.

'What devilment's been up here, I wonder!' he commented. 'Guess the skull's old enough by the look of it, but I'll have a look round all the same.'

A line of black ants making for a crevice in the soil drew his attention. He grovelled about a bit with a stick and uncovered the tops of several goats' heads. A swarm of ants were devouring every vestige of flesh, unconsciously preparing other skulls to tie to the tree.

'So that's it, is it?' muttered he, and having scraped back the soil, returned to his men.

He knew his native and made no comment on what he had seen, only storing it up as another instance of what he called 'black tom-foolery.' Another has called such 'groping after God, if haply they might find him.'

CHAPTER VII.

'ETIM THE SINGER.'

IN the beginning of the dry season Etim made a song. It was neither beautiful nor musical. But it was a remarkable song, for Etim had hardly seen the Obot bush cut three times. That is to say, he was barely fifteen years of age.

Thus it ran:

'Our great chief spake to the people. He said, 'When the yams are ripe we will feast.'

'Yea, brothers, we will feast on yams and wine; yams of the farms in the valley, wine of the mimbo tree.

'We will play our play with songs and dances; we will sing, 'The spirits have seen our hearts.

"They have beheld our sacrifices, blood of fowls and goats! blood to give them honour.

"They have blessed our farms; they have given us yams for eating, wine to drink.'

'We will praise the spirits, bless them for yams and wine; yams of the farms in the valley, wine of the mimbo tree.'

Etim sang his song on a moonlight night, and the people praised it. He stamped about in the great chief's compound, his voice accompanied by the big tom-toms, while the women clapped the time and the young men danced around. They cried to him a chorus, 'Haa-hee; haa-hee; haa-hee.' Like the song, it was not profound, but it excited him to sing the more. The silver of the brilliant moon, the weirdly moving throng of dancers, the far-spread shade of a towering cotton-tree, the thundering rattle of the noisy drums, contributed to his ecstacy. Eyes, ears, and even nostrils, drawing in the rank, noisome odour of rotting roof-mats and garbage, received a

hundred familiar sensations. With frenzied gusto he flung out the loud recitative. The shrill-pitched notes, combined with the deep-voiced 'Haa-hee, haa-hee,' of the chorus, and the shuffle of the feet, and the thump of the sounding goat-skins in the harmony of a nightmare. His muse grew wilder. He began to be poetical in his singing.

'Hunger, like a leopard, seizes upon me; the lusty thirst dries up my body.

'My nights lie down in weakness; my days groan slowly by.

'We wait for the feast, my brothers, the feast of yams and wine; yams of the farms in the valley, wine of the mimbo tree.'

'Haa-hee, haa-hee, haa-hee,' resounded the vigorous refrain. Furiously roared the drums, and swifter contorted the quivering bodies of the dancers.

At break of day, blear-eyed and sleepy, Etim took his paddle and followed his father down to the beach. The long canoe lay floating on

the black waters of the creek. Silently they embarked and pushed away under the great mangroves, lifting their dull green heads into the morning sunlight, the mudfish scrambling among their myriad roots. A light steam rose from the water and blurred the distances as they passed into the open river. A long time they proceeded in quietness, unbroken save for the plunge and swish of the paddles and the dull crash as they smote the hollow canoe.

Then Etim said, 'My father, O!'

His father answered only with a grunt.

'Shall I sit with the company of the young men, father, at the Feast of Yams? I have made a song, my father!'

'It may be!' grunted the old man.

But it was not so. Etim joined not in the feast he had praised at that time, nor for many years. A white man at Udwa, whither they went, saw the boy. His face was intelligent; moreover, he was black beyond his brethren

and looked clean. The trader admired him very much. He was the kind of boy he would like for a servant. He took the father on one side, and gave him a singlet and a cloth. He also brought out a pair of gaudy cuff-studs, with imitation pearl tops. The old man was delighted and went his way, leaving Etim behind him. There was great wonderment in Etim's compound that night. The tops of the cuff-studs pulled out and went in again with a click, as the old-fashioned sleeve-links used to do. No one remembered Etim and his song.

So Etim became a kind of slave. He did not think of himself as such, nor pity himself, nor wax indignant with his father. He belonged once to his parent. He might do as he liked with his own. If it pleased him to barter his son for a trifle that drew his fancy, Etim had no right to complain. He accepted his condition with the solemn philosophy of his race. Further, he was well off. His master was kind, did not work him overmuch, and gave him good food. It was better than

IN HIS DILEMMA HE WENT TO HIS MASTER.

he had in his father's compound, and there was plenty of it. That was a great factor in his contentedness.

Neither did the trader regard the boy as a slave. He hated slavery with the sound contempt of an Englishman. He could argue on the matter if need be. In this he was not inconsistent, for it never once occurred to his mind that the dark son of Ham stood in any other relationship than as a personal servant. It was agreeable to his facetiousness to call the lad 'Cobbles,' or for variety 'Wallsend.' He taught him English and how to wait at table. The master and boy got on well together. It pleased the white man that Etim had what he called 'plenty of savvy.' There was no need to enter into long harangues and explanations when a thing had to be done. Etim saw right through it at once.

At the end of the year the trader gave him money. It was wages. Etim bought a primer and a slate and tried to teach himself.

The attempt was a failure. The cook of the

establishment had no learning to help the boy, and Etim was nonplussed. In his dilemma he went to his master. At first he was ridiculed, but so earnest was he, that at last he obtained permission to go to a school whenever he could. Moreover, he went to Church on Sundays at times. Then strange hieroglyphics began to appear on the slate which no man could read. But they gradually took shape, became letters, words, sentences. Etim was greatly pleased and strove harder.

The second year passed and the master returned to England, leaving Etim free. It was the time of moon, and the lad sat often on the beach and thought of home and the song. It was very vague to him, but still he felt a strange wistfulness to return. In Udwa all the cotton trees were felled. There was no smell of the bush burning ready for the farms to be made. He did not miss them as such specifically. He knew he had not all the sensations of his own town.

But still he had been with the white man.

He could not quite go back to the old motiveless life, whose sole concern was to eat and drink, marry, beget children, and die in the hope of a place in the Town of Glad Spirits. The influence of civilisation was at work on him. His mind was not yet clear enough to argue the matter thus. But he knew that with the wistfulness to return was mingled a repugnance which he could not analyse.

He sought service with a new master, but he could not endure it. This trader was harsh and refused to let him attend school or church. He valued the latter much now. The amount of religion he had assimilated was very small, judged by church doctrines. But it was enough, for it told him of a good God and a hope in Christ. It was better than the Idem worship of his own people. Because the loss of opportunities to hear the new faith vexed him, he left his new service. The master was very angry, called it, 'tommy rot!' and hinted all sorts of lewd things about the boy.

Shortly afterwards the old master returned.

On the first night Etim stood on the verandah to greet him. The white man was genuinely pleased to see him. That night Etim stood in his old place behind his master's chair, glad, but solemn as ever. The other trader came to dinner and swore lustily about the boy. The two white men nearly quarrelled over the matter. Neither of them understood that Etim had made a song when barely fifteen, and so was gifted beyond the usual run of his race. He was still attending the school and the church and education was causing new thoughts to stir in his mind. On moonlight nights he would sit in the yard, and his thoughts were more wistful than ever. That was now because religion was creating a passion of love in him. He was slowly feeling his way to a strong desire to be the apostle to his people.

The overpowering call had not come yet. It did not come until the trader had succumbed to a fever. Etim tended him carefully in his illness, and even prayed for him secretly. When the moment of death had passed, and

the white man lay deep in the sandy soil, Etim felt his hour. No more he desired work of new masters, but entered a canoe and passed to his own town.

It was a different Etim from the one who had gone, blear-eyed, sleepy, and elated with the joy of his song, from the beach those years before. That was a stripling, practically naked. This was a full-grown man, dignified and cleanly dressed. The people knew him again, for some of them traded at the factory where he had been. A crowd conducted him back to his father's compound. It was more disreputable than it used to be. The old man had got very lax. He was asleep when his son arrived. They awaked him, and he grunted and slept again. Etim sat in the shade and gazed on the old scene—the surrounding rooms, the tiny ju-ju house in the filthy yard, with the ju-ju tree in front of it, and gin bottles, eggs, and strips of cloth. His heart sank. The old sensations were not now what they used to be.

In the evening the moon arose and the peo-

ple assembled to play in honour of the returned wanderer. He was idly playing with a pair of imitation pearl cuff-studs he had found in the house. As the drummers took their seats he looked up startled. The great cotton-tree was just beginning to fling its black shadow over the roofs; the old smell was in the air; the young men were ready to dance, the women to clap, and help sing the old 'Haa-hee, haa-hee.'

Soon the play began in earnest. The silver of the brilliant moon flooded all things; the dancers bellowed a new song of Etim's return, and went through all their grotesque contortions. And ever the drums rolled out their spirited din, the women clapped and sang. As with Elisha of old, the mad music roused a fire of burning words in Etim's heart. He moved among the watchers with restless step. His nostrils dilated, and his eyes shone white under the shade of the roof. Some recalled the talent of song he had exhibited as a boy. They pressed him to sing again. At a lull of the proceedings he stepped into the midst.

His voice was powerful, and better for the school-training it had received. He tuned it to the shrill falsetto chanting so loved of his people and began.

'Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands; serve the Lord with gladness.

'Come before his presence with singing; know ye that the Lord is God.

'It is He that hath made us, and we are His; we are His people, and the sheep of His pastures.

'Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.

'Give thanks unto Him, and bless His name, for the Lord is good.

'His mercy endureth for ever, and His righteousness unto all generations.'

Never before had the Psalm been sung in such a manner in such an assembly. It struck the imagination of the people, strange as was the subject for a play. But the theology was primary, and not adverse to anything they believed. 'Haa-hee, haa-hee,' they sang, in

gutteral, deep-toned chorus to the high obligato, the swift battering of the tom-toms, the sandy rasping of dancing feet, and the timing beating of hands. Fast rolled the perspiration from Etim's brow. The energy of song was in his heart, the heat of a great purpose in his soul. Swiftly he changed his theme to the noble 'Bless the Lord, O my soul.' The people knew not the apostle that was amongst them. To them all was merriment and lightness of heart.

But that night Etim founded himself in their understanding as a master of song. Heart-breaking was his ministry, but by song he began, and by song he conquered. In the compounds, while they played he sang to them of the doughty warriors of old, Joshua and David and their deeds, Deborah and Samson and *their* deeds—the fearless prophets, statesmen, and all who were renowned. The songs became me-nke, or sagas, among the people. They sang them at the waterside, the women crooned them to their babies. And then he sang the

mighty parables of Christ, the wondrous words and ways of his great Lord. Months he spent leading them on, from the marvels of the nativity, through the deeds and words of amazing love and mercy, to the death and resurrection, so fruitful of good to all mankind. And ever the people listened and marvelled, while still they cried 'Haa-hee, haa-hee,' and beat the echoing drums. They learned the songs themselves, and spread them through the towns.

And at last they began to believe!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PEACEMAKER.

FOREWORD.—The following story is true in almost every detail. Thus the Bende-Abam war began and ended about twenty-five years ago.

EMERE CHIKU stalked lazily along the road to Bende, at his heels trailing by a grass-rope a short-haired, sharp-faced, prick-eared, native dog, on his shoulder carrying a preposterously long, brass-bound, gas-pipe barrelled, flintlock gun. He carried it preposterously, too, native fashion, muzzle in front, butt behind. These were days of danger before the white man had penetrated so far inland. It behoved a man to travel armed. Besides a gun of any kind was a rarity, and Emere was inordinately proud of his.

His ostensible purpose was to sell the dog in Bende market, but he also wished to try the gun, it being new. It was therefore loaded half-way to the muzzle with scraps of brass and iron. He felt himself a hunter indeed. His keen eyes kept a sharp look-out for game —and enemies. But nothing presented itself, and the greater his disappointment the more eager he became to kill. It was with a sorely dissatisfied grunt that he laid down the gun at his feet in the market, and, squatting down, clasped the dog between his knees. His eyes roved about the throng for possible purchasers. By thousands, men and women, their brown bodies unclothed save for the veriest fragments of cloth, were pouring into the place, arranging their market baskets in long lines, and pursuing their bargaining in a perpetual gruff roar. Behind the lines of baskets in the shade of the great trees, the women crouched, handling with filthy fingers all manner of native commodities. Here were vegetables of all kinds, yams, plantains, beans, leaves, gourds, rubbing

against greasy gin-bottles refilled with palm-oil. There were the sellers of palm-wine with their large pots frothing over the brim. Meat, too, was here, a butcher's stall with a dead pig dissected just as it came out of its last mud-hole, bristles and all, and laid with sections of the uncleaned entrails on large plantain leaves, an attraction to a buzzing, swarming mass of blow-flies. A naked boy occasionally whisked them off with a cow's tail that had seen similar service many a year. Daintier tit-bits were to be had in the market, high-dried frogs spitted on sticks, multitudes of eggs of incalculable age, rats trussed much as an English poulterer deals with a rabbit, not to speak at all of fat grasshoppers' legs and monstrous lizards.

In this amazing medley of unsavoury wares sat Emere patiently awaiting a purchaser among the thickly-pressed crowds that moved to and fro, without jostling, down the narrow gangways. These market days were days of truce. Towns that otherwise would be fight-

ing like demons would here meet amicably to bargain. Emere recognised many of his personal foes. His eyes blazed with savage fury. The impulse that had been growing in his mind all the morning was to kill. His toes unconsciously played gently with the brass-bound barrel of his gun. One man he recognised as owing him a considerable debt. Springing to his feet he called loudly after him.

But the man was lost in the crowd, and when Emere turned to resume his seat, he found the dog had taken the opportunity to bolt. He could see it gulping down hungrily some scraps of smoke-dried black meat from a woman's basket, and he bellowed to the people close by to catch it. But the cur was too wary and led them a chase. Hither, thither, round and through the market it hastened, a perspiring, shouting, laughing press of youths in close pursuit. It passed by the feet of Njoku, a Bende man, and he, without a moment's thought, smote its spine in two with his heavy

matchet. The crowd roared with amusement, falling on one another in their transport, and imitating to one another the valiant blow. They followed closely as Njoku bore the carcase to Emere.

'The dog has died,' said the grinning slayer. 'Come now, had I not killed it, it would have gone to bush, and you would have seen it no more. Look kindly upon me who have served you and give me one leg only for my food!'

Emere took the dog sullenly, gazing on its severed back. Blood! Red, warm blood! The passion to slay and spill blood leaped to dreadful life.

Snatching his gun he roared:—

'You kill my dog? You think it good to kill? I kill, too, I kill you, dog of a Bende man!'

With no other warning he lifted the gun and fired it point blank in the other's face. The mass of metal scraps did their work well—a featureless, brainless heap of human flesh sank in a bleeding mass to the ground.

Instantly the market was in uproar. In half a minute men and women, wildly shouting, were snatching up baskets, or leaving them and fleeing pell-mell for their lives. And above the babel rose loud the hollow roar of the enormous war-drum, a section of cotton-tree, six feet thick, hollowed out and beaten with sticks. Two sweating men pounded it vigorously, and as they thrashed its thundering sides, from path and compound the Bende warriors poured into the market place. Into the midst, decked in all the feathered panoply of war, strode the war-chief.

'Let all the Abam people die!' he screamed.

The drum roared out in answer, and every warrior lifted his voice in a frightful battle-shout ere, as one man, they answered,

'Yes, let all the Abam people die!'

'Spare not man, nor woman, nor child!' screamed the chief. Again the drum bellowed out, and from a thousand throats went up the nerve-shattering shout, followed by the answering,

'We will not spare man, nor woman, nor child!'

'Go, catch them on the roads!' Once more the drum, the shout, and the answer, 'We go to catch them on the roads!'

Almost on the instant the market place was empty, save for a dead dog and a dead man. Soon the sun was shining peacefully through the still air into the market place, a buzzing swarm of flies circled round a puddle of blood, a few Bende women wailed and shrieked in the solemn death dance, but on the Abam road were clouds of dust, screams of women and children, the Abam folk, townspeople of Emere Chiku, falling in hundreds before the avenging spears and arrows. Of all the Abam people who visited Bende market that day not ten returned alive; and the number of the slain was about four hundred, mostly women and children.

. . . . . .

For eighteen months the war dragged on. Two farming seasons came and went, but few

farms were made. The young men went daily by companies and lay in ambush on the roads, waiting, waiting, to kill and kill. After that first frightful slaughter Abam had retaliated by a raid on Bende itself, but had been beaten off. The loss on both sides was terrific. The skull-heaps in both towns grew tremendously, and men strutted about with not one, but half-a-dozen eagle feathers in their hair, each a sign of having slain a foe.

So month by month a guerilla warfare had dragged along. Men and women in both towns were starving, no one dare go out to the farms, and had it not been for the frequent supply of human flesh famine would have seized as many victims as the fighting. Neither town could secure a decisive victory. The chiefs would have liked to call off the young men, but dare not for fear of the massacre that might follow. Helpless they sat in their houses waiting for some end to the hopeless struggle.

It was when things were at this pitch that the heart of Ijoma, an aged crone of Abam,

was moved to action. Three times had the messenger of ill tidings come to her house to say that in succession her husband and two sons had gone to grace a Bende feast. She had yet one son left to die, a youth of some fifteen years. Daily he practised with bow and arrows and she noticed with terror the looks of interest thrown upon him by the warriors as his skill increased.

One morning they stopped at the compound as they went to take up the usual ambush and carried the lad away with them. Then the desolate heart of her cried out in dismay. Flinging herself on the ground she rolled and screamed in the wildest sorrow, and begged them not to take her last boy. But they laughed and hurried him off, leaving her alone.

For an hour she brooded sullenly over the event; then arose and, taking a tiny hand-drum, called the women together. In the yard she harangued them fiercely at great length, with wailing and perpetual beating on her tiny

drum. Why did they fight so long and bitterly? For land or slaves?

'Nay,' she cried, 'we fight but for a dog! For a dead dog our young men go out to kill and come not back. Look and see! We have become a town of women, and the men that are left are old and futile. They cannot protect us from our enemy, nor are they able to beget us children to protect us. Our farms have become as forests, and we hunger for our proper food, and are full to sickness of this man-meat. Shall we suffer these things for the sake of a dead dog? Come, let us cry that war is ended. Let us make these old men go out to bargain for peace. Come, my sisters, if these old men fear to go let us go!'

The hot-hearted old soul cut no heroic figure as she spoke these words. She was bent with age, her hair almost white, her skin from neck to heel wrinkled into a million folds, her breasts hanging long and flat against her withered chest. The women answered her with a shout

ABAM MEN FROM THEIR AMBUSH SAW HER PASS.

of pleasure, but none stepped forth to go on the mission of peace.

'You come not?' she cried in scorn. 'You will let your people all die for a dog? But I will not, for I have but one son left and to-day he is gone. Come! Out of the way!'

Pushing through the crowd, she prepared for the task. With powdered chalk she whitened all her body, chalk being the symbol of peace, and taking her tiny drum in her hand, set forth on the Bende road. Twelve arduous miles of enormous hills, deep streams, muddy swamps, it was to Bende, but, faltering not, beating the drum without cessation, she urged her way along.

Outside the town she met no one. The Abam men from their ambush saw her pass, but said nought; the Bende men farther on heard her come, but dare not violate the chalk, and let her pass without a sign. On, on, past hill and river and swamp, to the never-ending rattle of the little drum the brave old soul marched until she stood in Bende market place.

Chiefs and people came rushing out and stopped, astonished at the chalk-whitened figure before them. Beating now mechanically, though her arm felt like wood, fatigued almost to the point of dropping by excitement, she still found strength to shout again and again.

'The war is done! the war is done!'

'Who says the war is done?' asked a chief.

'I say the war is done,' answered she; 'we will fight no more over dogs. Cry the peace in your town. Come, sit in palaver with the Abam men and make the peace!'

The Bende braves had by this time followed her in, while far out on the Abam road the Abam warriors were discussing what was to be done about this unauthorised peacemaker. In Bende the opinion was that war should cease, for all were weary of fighting.

'We will go with you,' said the chiefs. 'But only half-way to Abam. Let the Abam people meet us there. We have spoken!'

. . . . . .

On a hill-top where the road somewhat

widens, and almost half-way between the two towns, the armies of Bende and Abam are assembled with their chiefs; these at one end of the open space those at the other. The old woman, still ghastly under the chalk, and still holding her drum, stands as mistress of the ceremonies. Slowly she passes up and down looking for hidden weapons. Satisfied she turns to the Abam chiefs.

'You have brought the cow of peacemaking?' she asks.

The cow is pushed forward into the midst. The Bende chiefs likewise drive in their cow before Ijoma.

Taking a knife, she points it at her breast and cries, 'May Chineke, the maker of men, drive this knife into the heart of him who breaks this peace!'

The assembled braves cry out in acquiescence, 'Ee-yah!'

She plunges the knife first into one beast and then into the other, so that their bloods mingle, and dipping the blade into the mixed

blood, she scatters the drops in a circle, so that some falls on the chief of both parties. All is now nearly done as far as she is concerned. Taking the Abam chiefs, she presents to them the Bende cow, and similarly the Abam cow to the Bende chiefs.

'Let the people make the feast of peace!' she cries. 'The war is done!'

As one voice a shout from all rends the air.

'Ogula! The war is done!'

CHAPTER IX.

THE EGBU-NO-ORIE.

STOOPING, with one hand touching the ground, with the other Onyefu passed a short stick six times round his head, and muttered his request to the Egbu-no-orie.* 'Twice has the moon waxedgreat and died since I lost my goat. Truly I believe Kalanu took it while I slept. Therefore, O Egbu-no-orie, I pray you make him confess or die within yet two more moons.'

He rose, and Ononso, head priest of the oracle, took the stick from him and planted it amid hundreds more, each betokening similar prayers, protruding at all angles out of a litter of feathers of slaughtered sacrifices. There

* Egbu-no-orie, means: 'He kills on the second day of the week.'

was little else to see. The untidy mass lay in front of a cokernut set upright in the ground, and this in turn was backed by an ordinary tombo-palm.* Yet this was the shrine of the most powerful ju-ju cult of Ibo land since the smashing up of the 'Long ju-ju' in the Aro Chuku Expedition.

'Egbu-no-orie hears!' said Ononso. 'Within two months Kalanu shall confess or die. Then will you feed the Egbu-no-orie well with the lives of three young cocks.'

'You told me chickens from their mother's wing a while back!' protested Onyefu.

Ononso turned and looked on him. 'You lie!' he said truculently. 'Three young cocks or Egbu-no-orie shall seek you too, who would cheat him of his food.'

The dread threat told. Knowing it no idle talk from Ononso's lips, Onyefu stooped once more to the dust, with both hands touching the ground.

* A shrubby palm whose sap forms the chief native beverage, a toddy known as tombo, mimbo or palm-wine.

'I beg you,' he whined, 'curse me not, my big father, and I will give.'

'It is good,' said Ononso, and Onyefu crawled dejected away.

. . . . . .

'I don't know how this beastly climate affects you,' said a District Commissioner to an army captain, as they sat over morning whiskies, in a small town some seven miles from the Egbu-no-orie, and about six weeks after the above event. 'I get a brutal liver, makes me as irritable as a bear with a sore head. I'm like an electric battery. You can knock sparks out of me any time up to noon.'

'Same here,' murmured the captain, and feebly illustrated it by consigning to yet more tropic regions the boy who had weakened the whiskey with too much 'Sparklet.'

'Now, look here,' continued the District Commissioner, pointing with his glass through the open entrance of the palm-leaf booth under which they sat. 'Here's my police-corporal

hustling for once as if all his women were after him. Some cock-and-bull yarn, I'll bet two brass buttons, when he gets here.'

Into their presence rushed the excited policeman, his face shining with perspiration, and blurted out:

'We want you to come quick, sah!'

'As I was saying, Norton,' proceeded the District Commissioner calmly, ignoring the corporal.

'Sah!' burst out that worthy.

'Did someone speak?' said the District Commissioner.

'Me, sah!' coming up to attention and saluting.

'Oh, you corporal. Pass my note-book there. Thanks. Corporal James,' he read aloud as he wrote. 'Disrespect in not saluting when he first entered. Now, James, what is it?'

'Please, sah, I beg you, forgive me dis time, sah. I done forget.'

'Certainly not, James. You are not paid to forget. Now after that little breeze what has blown you in in such a hurry for once?'

'Sah, we want you come quick. Woman done live for die.'

The District Commissioner fixed a cold eye on him.

'That all? Boy, pass some more 'Sparklet.''

He waited for his glass to be replenished. 'Well, women die fairly frequently, James, I believe?'

'He so, sah! But we t'ink dis one catch poison-palaver. Dem Egbu-no-orie man live for come last night-time.'

'What?' shouted the District Commissioner. 'Why in the name of your holy ancestors did you not say so at once? Boy, my boots! Quick! Come on, Norton, I want more than enough to catch that blighter. Turn out all the police and court messengers, James, and search the town. Do you mind sending your soldiers out too, Norton? Thanks. We'll catch him if he hasn't gone already. Boy, you

son of a grandam snail, my boots, come on there!'

'Now,' said the District Commissioner two minutes later. 'Where's the woman? Hi there, James!'

'Sah!'

'Pass on ahead and show us the woman.' They found her body, knotted and contorted as if death had been shockingly painful.

'Strychnine,' said Norton, 'if these people know anything about it.'

'Thorn more likely,' said the District Commissioner; 'that acts nearly the same.' He scrutinised the feet of the corpse, then carefully extracted a thorn. 'There you are,' he said, holding it up. 'And here's another!' He stooped and picked up one from the dust of the verandah. 'That devil of a ju-ju man has been scattering them with a view to getting somebody. Where's her husband?'

A shrinking negro was hauled out of a dark room in the hut and put before him.

'Here, James, you speak this unearthly lingo. Ask him if he's her husband.'

'Ih!' answered the trembling native affirmatively.

'What's his name?'

'Kalanu.'

'Well, tell him the woman is murdered, and we want the murderer. We suspect the Egbu-no-orie man. We will go to his town for him if he is not here. Can this man guide us?'

A blank stare of bewilderment came into the negro's eyes. Things were moving too rapidly for his comprehension. He leapt into a voluble stream of explanations.

'Stop him, James, do,' said the District Commissioner wearily. 'Isn't it just sickening, Norton? Is it possible, I wonder, to get a straight 'Yes' or 'No' to a simple question? Ask him again, James. Can he guide us to the Egbu-no-orie?'

Bewilderment turned to suspicion. Natives hate leading questions, not knowing where the

answer may land them. Again Kalanu began a torrent of talk.

The District Commissioner sat down resignedly on an earthen seat, and flicked at his boots with a thin switch, until the harangue was done.

'There's another native trait, Norton!' he said at last. 'They would rather be pulled to bits by their wretched medicine-men than lift a finger to bring them to justice. Here case after case of the doings of this ju-ju have been brought to my notice. Five months I've been trying to find it, and though it is known from here to Lagos, I'll be hanged if any one will show me. But it can't be far from here. The priests themselves don't travel much.'

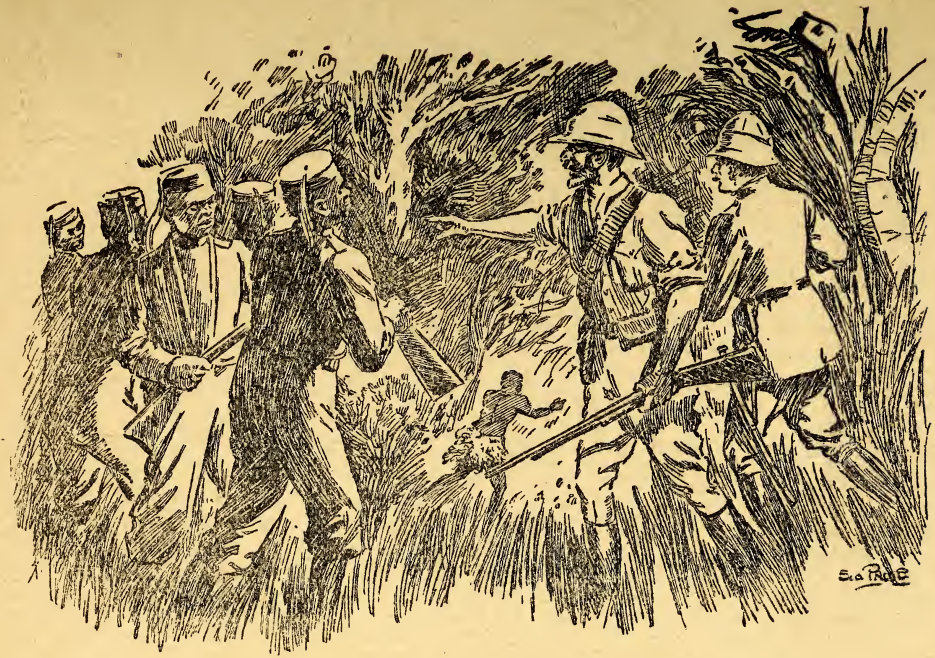
'Well, what is this Egbu-no-orie, anyhow? asked Norton.

'Oh, don't you know? Why, it's a big ju-ju that has been in existence from time immemorial, but has become strongly anti-Government since we broke up the Aro-Chuku one. The towns come along and all swear before it that

they will refuse to obey the white men in any matter for the term of a year. Let the ju-ju kill them if they do. And, by gum, it mostly does too! The priests and priestesses are pretty numerous. They are slaves presented by chiefs at different times. Some also are the offspring of brothers and sisters, permitted to marry together for that purpose. Well, I'm going to stir up the whole boiling now. This kind of thing'—he pointed to the convulsed body of the woman, 'justifies anything. I shall seize the chiefs and hold them as hostages till they give us guides. It is not as if they did not know the way.'

In twenty-four hours the chiefs gave in, and long before sunrise a tramping party of soldiers and police set forth.

At daybreak Ononso emerged from his hut at the head of a long line of priests' houses round the shrine. He blinked in the increasing light and passed to perform certain rites at the shrine. In the midst of them he heard the shuffle of many bare feet, and, starting up,



'PUT DOWN THAT CARBINE. . . . TAKE HIM ALIVE!'

found himself face to face with a squad of soldiers. One sprang forward to seize him, but he was too quick, leaped aside, and dashed off down a narrow bush-path.

'After him,' yelled the District Commissioner. 'If we don't catch him they'll start the whole show again somewhere else. That's the head priest according to descriptions. Put down that carbine, you ass!' He knocked down the muzzle of a gun with which a soldier was already covering the retreating figure. 'This is not war. Take him alive!'

Pell mell they tore along the path, until it dipped into a deep and narrow ravine, its sides thickly clothed with huge trees and bush. Far down they could hear the bushes snapping and breaking as Ononso plunged desperately on.

'I've a mind to put a shot down there and wing him,' said Norton.

'There'd be an infernal row at Calabar if you did,' said the District Commissioner. 'Take him alive if we can. There, he's stopped! He will crawl around now, and the old fox will

take to earth probably. Search, you police, there. In after him!'

Down the narrow path, rugged, rocky, and water-torn, plunging into the bushes, stumbling over the tree roots, catching at creepers or anything to stay their nasty slips, they descended until at the bottom they emerged on a pool overhung with trees. It was an amazing sight. Stagnant and loathsomely green it lay under the sun, from end to end choked with baskets and pots containing every manner of native eatable in all stages of decay. Some had been there years. The smell was utterly appalling.

'Eau de Cologne,' muttered the District Commissioner. 'Got any smelling salts anybody? Good gracious, is that an alligator!' He pointed to the further shore. In very truth it was, fat and somnolent.

'Crack!' rang out Norton's Mannlicher, and the alligator placidly rolled over and died. At the sound there emerged from an evil-looking cave another alligator, equally fat, but this

time wary. But wariness availed him not. He fell a second victim to Norton's gun. On examination both were found to be decorated with huge copper rings on their legs.

'Brought here as youngsters, evidently,' commented the District Commissioner. 'Wonder if there's anything else in that cave!'

'Don't know,' said Norton. 'Shall we look?'

'No fear,' answered the other. 'I draw the line fairly wide at stalking about amongst snakes and scorpions and other creepy-creepies. You go if you like.'

'Right oh!' Striking matches, Norton penetrated into the foulsome depths. It was not a big cave and he soon returned.

'Rotten place,' he said, in answer to the other's unspoken question. 'Toads and centipedes and scorpions by the hundred, I should think. And spiders! There was one big fellow sat at the other end and positively glared at me. Did ever you feel cold water down your back? Let me get in the sun, for mercy's sake!'

'Ugh, talk's enough,' said the District Commissioner. 'Well, we've got to break up this show. 'Let's start on that tree, while your fellows hunt around a bit for that priest. Get your matchets to work there, you police.'

The tree was thick and as it proved monstrously hard. The matchets recoiled with hardly any impression left.

'That will take a blue month,' commented Norton. 'Let's put the Maxim on.'

'Good idea!' said the other.

The Maxim was brought down and placed, and soon a steady stream of bullets was ripping the thickness of the tree to matchwood. In two minutes it creaked, tottered, and fell with a crash right across the gully, fifty feet above the water.

Corporal James, with the excitement of his race, sprang upon the fallen giant and ran lightly across the impromptu bridge. At the other end he stopped, and after peering intently in the direction of his feet, held up his hand and shouted.

'Tree done fall, sah. Dem priesty man done stand for under. He lay here, sah, live for dead. His head all done broke, sah!'

A little later, having risked the passage, the District Commissioner and Norton stood among the branches gazing upon the broken, bleeding mass beneath them. Already a busy stream of black ants in their thousands was pouring over the body, drowning in the still flowing blood, detaching red points of flesh and bearing them away. For a time the two looked on.

'Horrible sight!' said the District Commissioner. 'James, have this body cleared up and buried at once. Norton, old man, this is what you'd call 'poetic justice,' isn't it, or what the good folk would call the 'hand of God.' Come out of this, old man; I'm sick.'

Together they turned and left Ononso.

CHAPTER X.

THE CALL OF KIN.

ALTHOUGH it was early morning and the long round of office work was unbegun, the Assistant District Commissioner sat in his office nervously tipping a black ebony ruler end over end with little taps upon the blotting-pad before him. Again and again his eyes wandered to the clock solemnly tick-tocking to the swept and tidied room. Only that, and the steady tap-tap of the revolving ruler, broke the unusual silence. Outside, in the rapidly increasing glare of sunlight, a subdued sort of commotion was going on. Blue uniforms of police and court messengers mingled with the undescribable tangle of colour that represented the best state costume of a

large crowd of chiefs and people. Even the Commissioner had dropped his usual easy-going 'whites' for the stiff, green, brass-buttoned uniform of his official capacity. His battered old khaki 'Wolseley' lay under the table in favour of the smart white helmet, with its olive-green puggaree, on the chair beside him.

Strange doings seemed afoot. Very strange! The key to the situation lay in the presence of two manacled prisoners who sat just within the office door, sternly guarded by rifle-armed police.

Six-thirty! Tick-tock! Tap-tap! In the distance the sound of vigorous hammering. The Commissioner was undoubtedly nervous, almost frightened. He cleared his throat with a husky, grating noise, and bent unthinking energy to the indenting of sundry impressions in a ring round a big blot on the writing-pad. The prisoners and police remained perfectly motionless.

Six-thirty-five! Tick-tock! Tap-tap! The distant hammering ceased in favour of the

TWO MANACLED PRISONERS SAT JUST WITHIN THE OFFICE DOOR.

'Hwu! Hwu! Hwu!' loudly staccato and penetrating, indicative of men straining on a lifting job. The ruler slipped from the nervous fingers and fell with a clatter to the floor.

'Policeman!' The Commissioner hardly recognised his own voice, it was so husky, and yet it sounded like a thunderclap in that silent room.

'Sah!'

'Tell these prisoners the time is nearly gone! Are they fully aware that in a short time now they must die?'

The policeman gabbled the question in a voice that grated on the young man's nerves like a rasp.

'Ih!' answered the prisoners affirmatively, stolidly.

One was young, a lad of barely twenty, the other an older man. Both were clearly from the bush, savage and primitive, perfectly indifferent to their coming fate. The great savage, primitive bush, spoke out its passive, untamed, chaotic power in every point of their

attitude. The white man, representative of the keen cutting edge of civilisation, destined to conquer finally, yet felt helpless, blunted before the colossal passivity of this barbarian resistance to law. He positively shuddered, and went on tap-tap! tap-tap!

Six-forty! Tick-tock! Tap-tap! The gallows head could now be seen above the people.

'Policeman, ask the prisoners if they have anything to say before they die, any messages to their people or anything of that sort!'

Again the gabbled, raucous voice tore the Commissioner's nerves. The prisoners sat silent. 'You nigger you, answer dere, s'pose white man speak you,' shrilled the over-zealous constable. 'Ho! what's the matter you no talk-er?'

The white man's wrath boiled. 'You half-civilised black cuss!' he said to the policeman; 'can't you treat the poor devils kindly when they'll be strung up in a few minutes? Ask them again and ask them properly!'

The negro wilted, and put the question servilely now. Still silence!

Six-forty-five! Tick-tock! Tap-tap!

The younger prisoner cleared his throat and began to speak rapidly, the policeman interpreting.

'White man! we know that we must die. So it is in the law of the white man and it is good. Yet that we have done is not worthy of death. Does the white man slay him who kills the leopard that steals his people? Listen to me, O my big father.

'Before ever the white man came to sit in judgment on those who kill and enslave men we lived in peace in our country, I and my father, and this man, my father's brother. But the day of evil things was near, and there arose one with the heart of an akiko,* for he came upon us in the night and slew my father, and snatched away me and my young brothers, and sold us to be slaves. Many days we travelled, bearing the heavy loads of our

* A fox-like animal, prowls at night, occasionally robs hen-roosts.

owner, and sore were our feet, and stiff our necks, before we reached to Bonny. Much we hungered in the way, and our hearts were sick for mother and friends. But our master drove us on, beating and scolding us. And at Bonny we lived in the compound of our master close to the great white man's house, and none knew that we were slaves. We were small and timid, and dare not tell.'

'Many dry seasons and wet seasons—their number I am not able to count—we sat there. Our master treated us mainly well, but for want of home my tiny brothers mourned to death. But I was bold of heart and lived, and made vows to my country ju-jus to live. For in the long nights while I sat alone over the embers after preparing my master's food, I would see again the bloody corpse of my father, would hear again the wailing of my mother, behold again the wasted bodies of my dead brothers. And always I said I would go free to revenge——'

Six-fifty! Tick-tock!

'Policeman, tell him to make haste, the time is nearly gone.'

'O dima! o dima!'* answered the youth. 'It is six moons past now since, being grown to manhood, I ran away from my master, and travelled straight to my own country. And even as I passed by the first compounds, I saw this man, my father's brother, seated in the shade. I called to him and he knew me not, so great was I grown. Therefore I gave him my name, and he made me sit, and brought me gin and tombo.† All that night we drank, and the young men came and danced and sang with us because I had returned. Thus the murderer, now gotten old, heard that I was come, and like the rest came out to see me in the morning.

'When I saw him I knew him, for who knows not again the slayer of his parent? He was old, and grey, and wizened, like a yam left in the sun to dry. Sickness had been sore upon

* "It is good! it is good!"

† Tombo, palm-wine.

him and had left him full of humours and pains. His hands trembled with weakness and fear as he stretched them out to me for mercy. Even then was I ready to lift my cutlass and smite him down. But this, my father's brother, restrained me. Yet the old man saw my spirit and hastened away with great fear.

'Then my father's brother and I lay down to sleep, for we felt weary and sick after the night of play. And at midday the old man returned and with him came a young girl bearing on her head a pot of food.

''I will eat,' said I, but I said nought else, for my heart hated him. I rose and began to eat. And the food was good indeed. But first I made him eat, lest he should be giving me death in the pot. We ate it all to the last, and as I dipped my fingers in the pot to take the last morsels my hand brought up a bone, and as I looked upon it I knew that it was the bone of a man.

''Why do you make me eat man-meat?' said I.

'And even as I asked the old man looked on me and laughed. Yes, the akiko-hearted old father laughed and spat on the bone in my hand.

''You may not harm me now,' he cried, 'for you, too, have shared in the death of your father. For look, is not this the bone of the finger of his right hand which I have kept among my medicines these many years? Bite on it, boy, chew it well. You are one with me in your father's death, for of him you have eaten.''

Six-fifty-five! Tick-tock! But the Commissioner did not notice now!

'Then up I rose in wrath and called on this man, my father's brother, and together we fell on that vile old fox, and our cutlasses drank deep of his blood. And his black liver* we cast to the dogs of the yard, and cut him to a hundred pieces, so great was our anger. My father's brother, did we well?' He yelled the question with flashing eyes and shaking chains.

* The liver is regarded by Cross River natives as the seat of the affections, etc. English synonym: heart.

'Ee-yah!' bellowed back the other, just as excited. Then, before the white man could stop them, they burst into a dirgeful, weird chanting, responding to one another in turn.

'The white man has brought us to die the death, my uncle.'

'Yes, he has brought us to die the death.'

'Why does he cause us thus to die, my uncle?'

'Truly you ask me why!'

'Is it that we have broken our people's customs, my uncle?'

'No, for those we have rightly kept.'

'The white man's law differs from ours, my uncle.'

'Yea, it differs indeed from ours.'

'We know not the law of the white man, my uncle!'

'We know not the law——'

'Goodness, policeman, do tell them to hold that row. Here, look at the clock!'

Seven o'clock! The clock metallically beat out the hour. The Senior Commissioner was

already hurrying along the path, likewise clad in official green and brass.

'Policeman,' said the young man, 'pinion the prisoners and make haste!'

The constable advanced and lashed their arms to their sides. The Senior Commissioner noticed that the cords were drawn too tight and cutting into the naked flesh.

'Slacken that cord' he said. The cord was slackened duly.

'March them out and tell them not to be afraid. There will be no pain. It will be all over before they can count two. Poor devils.' He followed them with his eyes compassionately. Civilisation, relentlessly just, amazingly pitiful!

Indifferently still, almost with smiles on their otherwise stolid faces, the prisoners stepped forward.

Barbarianism passively obedient, almost hopelessly unimpressible.

Seven-five! Tick-tock! Nevertheless, the times are moving!

CHAPTER XI.

FANCIES FREE.

THE two men sat in low deck-chairs on the Mission House verandah, gazing out across the wide vista of river and mangrove-swamp. There was a halt in the talk, which had engaged itself with native psychology, its shades and tones, vagaries and intricacies, moral and ethical principles, its seeming childishness broken by exhibitions, bursting through from beneath, of the red fires of elemental savagery.

'The man does not live who has gauged it yet,' had said the taller, older man thoughtfully. 'We have not the spiritual measures and standards to hand. Even our terminology won't do. It is too scientific, too bloodless. We have no

words to translate the native expressions for abstract ideas. Why, even 'Morning, noon, evening, night' are colourless beside the highly-picturesque Efik forms. 'Joy' has nothing of the vigorous life of 'ndaresit,' which fairly shouts at you of its vitality. It means heart-ripening, heart-reddening—a metaphor of fruit, you perceive—in the genial sunshine of the gladdening object. It expresses mellowness of feeling, height of life, expansive complacency. A remarkable word, indeed. Yet many other words expressing mindstates are equally poetic, and without any synonym in our tongue. Probably thus, in a simpler way than our more complex minds can quite manage to grasp, the native gets at the heart of immense things.'

Silence held the two for a long time as they sat blinking slightly, their eyes dazzled by the wide expanse of intensely sunlit waters lying grey-white under the mid-day sun, with Parrot Island, a dull green blot, in the middle distance.

'Now look,' said the same man again, half-rising from his sprawling position and point-

ing to the island. 'I suppose a poet ought to say that at the present moment that looks like a brilliant sapphire in a silver setting. Perhaps the root of poetry is not in me, perhaps it has been extracted or burned out by fevers and what not. Anyhow I can think of no finer comparison for Parrot Island just now than that it looks as much like an over-ripe greengage squashed down on a looking-glass as anything else.'

The other chuckled quietly. 'Beastly rotten one, too, when you get near to it,' he said. 'Odours! Noses were not made for Africa, I'm thinking.'

'No! And yet here we sit, and have sat, and others before us, and others will after us, and we think to ourselves and say, too, that the mystery of Africa is all revealed; the white man has been, and is everywhere, and yet, right before our eyes two miles from this very door, is an island, four miles long by a mile or more wide, and I question if the foot of a white man has penetrated fifty yards from its edge.

There is a doorway, too, just one little creek, that a small canoe might ascend at half-tide, and possibly running back some distance. Never seen it? Well, that's pardonable; its mouth is pretty well smothered with leaves, sort of place where pirates lurk in the books of our boyhood.'

The older man who was speaking grew reflective again. 'It strikes me that the position with regard to that island is something like the native mind. Speech does not come quite glibly at the moment, but anyhow there is the same glamour and picturesqueness to the man not habitually in contact with it, the same disillusion and cynicism with the man upon whom it impinges every day, and yet, withal, if we but observe, the same mystery and unknowableness of this that lies before our very eyes. There is a doorway, too, I am quite sure, but found by few or none, so hidden is it. Perhaps 'Language' is written above it. Hellow! steamer out there? What is it?'

The other studied it a moment. 'German,

Woermann Line, I fancy. But I say, that theory of yours—rather pretty no doubt, but, you know, one wants proof of the faith that is in you.'

The tall man considered awhile, meantime following with unseeing eyes the course of the steamer as it drew rapidly across the gap between Parrot Island and the next isle.

'Well, I'll give you proof,' he said at length. 'I heard a story the other day showing plainly enough that the native mind is not the sterile, futile thing we sometimes think it, but is possessed of a really extraordinary power; the kind of mind, indeed, that invents fairy tales and then believes them. And yet the story leaves one wondering just what it means, or illustrates, or intends. Here's at you!

'On the other side of Bende, indeed, far past Azakoli for the matter of that, is a town called Ama Ezi. It isn't much of a place. I doubt, even, if you will find it on the map. There it is, poked up on a hill-top in the bush, probably

a compound of a larger town, seeing it is the proud possessor of a market place.

'As the story goes it seems that not so long since, maybe two years or rather more, the market was in full swing, or full 'hum' might be a better word. Suddenly, without a moment's warning, came crushing down from the sky a couple of huge stones, sizzing hot, that fell plump into the middle of the market, then burst, and evolved two black, shining, naked men from their midst. Well, you can guess there was the dickens of a panic, women and men hustling, scrambling, shouting, wailing, stumbling over yam piles and baskets, chickens flying and squawking, goats diving among people's legs, dust and confusion beyond all description, everyone finding absolutely the shortest track out of that market place. All except one poor old woman who, from very excess of fear, simply sat astonished. Her these two men approached and demanded food. But she seems to have been too utterly helpless to hand them anything, although the ground

must have been littered with deserted baskets. Thereupon they killed her; how, I cannot say. Meanwhile the bolder spirit of the people peered upon the scene from such refuge as the bush afforded them. After the first diabolic act the two heavenly visitants sat about talking and making merry together. Presently who should walk into the market place but two white men, Government officials from the district centre. These strolled calmly into the middle of the open space until they came across the dead body and the two men beside it. Naturally, a big palaver soon arose as to the why and wherefore of this woman lying there dead. As for the two black men, they kept a very high hand and said they had heard of the white man's dispensation of justice. Would they now judge this case whether it was right or wrong to kill her who refused them food?

'Of course there was only one answer, and on top of that the white men ordered the arrest of the culprits. At that they laughed, killed the two Europeans in a blaze of flame, and

promptly disappeared into their stones, reascended into the sky and vanished.

'That's the story. You can judge the extraordinary imaginativeness of the native mind when the whole community can be quite convinced of its truth in face of the hard fact that no Government official in the extremely short history of Bende and Okigwi as government stations has been known to disappear, mysteriously or otherwise. But the meaning of it! That is the baffling thing. I am convinced that it must represent some phase of native mind-working. Does it merely mean that unsociability is the one deadly sin? Hardly, when every town is so inimical to strangers. Does it mean that the gods above are capricious, easily provoked and revengeful? It illustrates that native idea, anyhow. Or is it the negro's version of 'Black is black, and white is white, and never the twain shall meet' —to misquote the *letter* of Kipling—so that black man's gods will not bow to white man's laws? That is possible. Or is it only a merry

gibe at the white man with his large pretensions to power, daring even to lay hands of arrest on the heavenly ones? Fathom it who can, I cannot. Personally I seem to detect in it a little pathetic, weary inquiry for the truth, whether with white or black, and a little disappointment with the white, unable to help against the savage decrees of the gods.'

'Um!' responded the other, stroking his chin reflectively, then, after a pause, 'Pshaw, a mere wonder story, probably a new edition to some remote myth. Anyhow, I don't think the natives could so far lose their dread of the white man as to laugh at him. There might be something in your last view, concerning the sense of the failure of the white man to reach their expectations!'

'Can't they laugh at the white man? Mister, you have much to learn yet! There is a song sung at Bende pretty frequently by the women, which at first I thought was one huge joke at the white man's expense. I know they *do* sing jeering things about us. But the one I have

in mind belongs to the vaguely uncomfortable class really, the disappointment of the thought that, after all, Europeans are so much like themselves. I will give you a line or two as I have been able to gather them from time to time—

"'The white man sits over us in judgment; he judges all things,
He hears all kinds of cases—murders, land palavers, and thefts;
He judges each case justly, he calls all the witnesses;
He punishes the wicked, he sends them to gaol.
We cannot bribe him; we cannot corrupt him.
But we never hear that he judges Death;
Death fears not the court of the white man; the white man bows before him;
We do not know where death comes from. Can any find him out?
We look for his country; we do not see it;
If we see it we will bring him to be judged by the white man.'

'WELL, COFFEE, AND WHAT HAS TAKEN YOU SO BADLY THIS FINE MORNING?'

'That is a very rough translation of a song that varies considerably from time to time. But it conveys the general idea. There is another song or two exhibiting this same enquiring mind. You ought to hear them, but I won't bore you with them now. I think I have sufficiently established the proofs you wanted.'

'Um!' said the other once more. 'I suppose you have. But it is a funny thing, I have never come across anything of the sort myself.'

A negro with one hand tightly pressed to the region of his stomach, groaning miserably, and with a face woebegone in the extreme, stumbled at this point up the verandah steps.

'Well, Coffee,' asked the younger man, 'and what has taken you so badly this fine morning?'

'Massa, belly catch palaver plenty strong too much. I t'ink snake do live for inside. He go crawl and spit and bite all same as snake.'

'What's the matter you think so, Coffee?'

'Massa, I not savvy.* Belly humbug me

* know.

too much. He bite me too strong, all like snake, he do crawl all about, he spit for my mouth make bad mouth palaver. What t'ing I fit go do, sah?'

'Better ram a pistol down his throat,' said the older man laughing, as he rose from his chair and began to walk into the house. 'Only who now never comes across that sort of thing I've been describing? It's from the sublime to the ridiculous, of course. But all of the same order, my friend, all of the same order.

CHAPTER XII.

MOONBEAMS.

THE moon rose just a little above the black trees of Parrot Island and flung across the two miles of water separating them from the beach at the foot of the mission hill a great spreading path of light. The resident missionary and his tall guest sat out on the verandah enjoying the cool breeze idly crawling up-river from the sea.

'I say, friend, but look there! Is that not marvellous?' exclaimed the host.

Into the strip of shining way a long canoe had slowly sailed at about a mile distant. Its two triangular sails, one at either end, were set to catch the modicum of breeze. On the stern sat perched the steersman, wielding his long

paddle. The whole was perfectly silhouetted in clean-cut black against the moonlit stream. The two watched it crawl again into the shaddows.

'Yes,' agreed the older man, 'it is marvellously beautiful. I sometimes wonder which is more truly splendid, moonlight on the water thus or moonlight in the bush.'

'I should not have thought there would be any ground of comparison. Look at it!' said the other, waving his hand towards the river.

'Yes I see it. But when I spoke of bush I was thinking of some of those wonderful Ibo towns far up north, where the palm trees stand as dense as trees in an English wood. When the moon shines through them it seems like holy ground. Their white stems shoot up straight and slim and unbroken from the black ground, to hide themselves in the great gloomy crowns of leaves, and to walk amongst them is like strolling in the dim colonnades of a mighty deserted temple. If the Garden of Eden had been in the tropics I could thoroughly under-

stand the Lord God coming to walk in it in the cool of the day. It would be a fit environment for any god.'

The other eyed him curiously. 'Hello!' he said. 'This is he who at midday spoke pessimistically of the spirit of poetry having been driven out of him. Seeing now that the expulsion was not permanent, perhaps you will describe this to me by something a little more tasteful than an over-ripe greengage on a mirror. Come now!' He pointed again to the stream.

'That. Oh, it always makes me think that the great World-Artist has taken a brush of angels' feathers and dipped it in molten silver and drawn a glittering way for his feet upon the waters. That's sententious, perhaps, but I blame the moon. It seems to affect lots of people out here. Somebody was telling me the other day that everybody who comes to the coast becomes more or less eccentric. I believe it is true.'

'But then,' asserted the host, scenting an

"LOOK AT IT!' SAID THE OTHER, WAVING HIS HAND TOWARDS THE RIVER.

argument, 'if that is so, it ought to affect the natives too!'

'Well, does it not? Have you never heard them yelling, and drumming, and dancing, and singing and becoming half demented in the moonlight nights?'

'Hum, yes, that is very true certainly.' He paused awhile, considering. 'But I say, though,' he continued, 'did you ever hear what they sing about on those nights?'

'Mostly nonsense, I think. I never heard of anything particular among these Efiks and Ibibios, except abusing women and enemies. But at Bende there are one or two songs that are really worth singing. I have told you the one about the Mystery of Death. But there is another sung at the time of New Yams. You understand it is impossible to give a literal translation because the words vary so; but the ideas remain the same. Here is a rough rendering of it.'

He cleared his voice and gazed reflectively

out to the island for a minute. Then he spoke in a low recitative.

"Come let us sing our songs to the gods who made all things.

We bring in the new yams for offering; we give them to Akuri and Awka.

Akuri is the maker of yams and cassava; Awka is the protector of men.

But we know not the big god above them, we do not know his name.

We die, and are sick, and have trouble; we sacrifice, but we get no help.

We do not know the reason for this thing; we do all the things of our fathers.

Our fathers have told us these are our spirits, but we think they told us falsely.

We look on all things with wonder, we know not how they come and go.

The sun rises east every morning; who made him or sends him we cannot tell.

How strange also is the growth of the yam, the commonest yam of the farm.

We cut it, bury it in the earth, the light and sun behold it not.
We wait and watch for its growing, and it rots and perishes away.
But behold from the rot grows a yam-stalk; life springs from the grave of death.
Surely Akuri knows nothing of all this, he sits like a fool in the earth.
We search for the Mighty Unknown One, the maker and keeper of life.'

'And so on, and so on, ad lib, in the usual manner. Remember I am not saying that that is a literal rendering, but that it actually contains the ideas of the song as sung.'

He dropped back into his chair and passed into deep meditation. The other had been listening entranced.

'I say,' he said at last eagerly, 'you don't mean they sing that? Talk about Paul and the altar to the Unknown God! Look here, though, why don't they drop these gods if that is how they feel?'

'Custom, conservatism, cowardice. I know

not which most,' returned his guest. 'But of Christianity they have their suspicions, and generally speaking, are loth to cross into it. It reminds me of that canoe we saw awhile ago. They emerge from the darkness for a brief moment into the light of truth, are dazzled, and vanish again into the night.'

He settled himself more deeply in his deck-chair, drumming idly on the arm-rests with his fingers, and gazing steadily out to the river. Presently he raised himself again.

'I was just considering,' he said, 'to what I should liken this generation and its attitude to truth. Well, it is like that! See?' He pointed to a paw-paw tree standing on the brink of the cliff, its every broad, deeply-indented leaf finely profiled in dead black against the path of light. Beneath the crown of leaves, closely hugging the tall, clean stem, its large fruit could be discerned in similar outline in one huge drooping cluster.

'By this soft light you can barely see what that tree may be, excepting that it has stem,

leaves, fruit. But in the raw light of broad day you will behold it more clearly. You may even be disappointed to find that that stout-looking stem is soft as elder-pith almost, and that the fruit is largely unripe, and the whole tree by no means the noble thing it looks now. But none the less it appears now and will in the more garish light of day a tree of possibilities. Thus the negro. Not yet has he been exposed to the uncompromising light of broad day. We have to view him dimly as it were. But even now we can see the fruit. The possibilities of a future are in him.

'I will explain what I mean concretely. The other day I met a woman away back in one of the bush towns, as you would think far from the influence of any type of Christianity. She came to me in distress for advice and help. And the matter was this. Personally her knowledge of Christianity was practically nil. What it might stand for, who its founder might be, what it might teach, were as unknown to her as to a newborn babe. Her light on the sub-

ject was as properly reflected light as these beautiful moonbeams. Her brother and mother had become Christians. She saw that somehow it was good, and she too would be Christian. Forthwith she told her husband, of whom she was the third wife. He answered her with ridicule. She persisted that she wished to be Christian. He became annoyed and called her a fool. What were the Christians? They were not anything, but were fooling themselves. Yet she maintained her purpose. Thereupon both he and his other two wives fell upon her, and flogged her unmercifully, and told her they would drive her away if she held in this way. It made no difference. She refused to perform the usual sacrifices on account of her coming child. Without a single belief to help her other than the grace of Christianity as seen in her relatives she rejected the whole mass of heathen rites. They drove her forth with threats, and curses, and blows, and she fled to her people. The advice I gave is immaterial here. The

point is the abundance of fruit in a soul with so little light.

'I'll give you another case where the light was as dim as that of a single star. It is not a typical case, maybe, but it is germane to my theme. There was a woman in a bush town who knew nothing of Christianity at all, and yet in her the light of better things dimly gleamed. She was a young, unmarried girl, and by the custom of her people was betrothed to a husband for a large sum of money. Duly the dowry was paid, and the bridegroom came to receive his bride. But she revolted, a thing unheard of before, and utterly refused to go. Deep in her was the glimmer of a thought that anything was preferable to life with this man, whom she had never seen before, who was old enough to be her grandfather, and had already more wives than he knew how to count. Her parents and he were pitiless. They dragged her away; shut her up; endeavoured by every means to make her obey. She escaped; they recaptured her She escaped again, and in

hope of protection gave herself to a young man she liked. Parents and husband went to law for her recovery before the Native Court. That consisted of native chiefs, and anyhow, even supposing a white man had been sitting, the law of the Government is that no native custom must be interfered with unless it is repugnant to morality and justice. Don't smile, friend, a district commissioner told me that in those very words. And we must give the government credit that they are trying to devise more equitable marriage laws to override native custom.

'Well, the man had no difficulty, backed up as he was by the parents, in proving that he had faithfully paid all the dowry. The girl could offer only the plea that she hated the old scoundrel, and such is no plea at all in law. Apparently it neither affects the sense of justice or morality. Anyhow it had no effect upon the chiefs in court. They ruled that the man of her choice must yield her to her owner, and she must go with him quietly.'

'Did she go?' interposed the other eagerly.

'Well, yes, she went as far as the first night's resting-place.'

'And then?'

'She hanged herself.'

'Good God!' ejaculated the host, not in the least irreverently.

'Fact!' affirmed the guest. 'But there was a little promise of fruit in the exceedingly dim light, I think, don't you?'

The other answered by a nod almost unseen in the shade of the overhanging roof, after which they sat silent for some long time, each occupied with his own thoughts.

Suddenly from the town near by a sharp wailing rang out keen and clear above the shrill shrieking of the crickets in the long grass. Up and down it rose and fell, now uttering unintelligible language and again a long piercing note of grief. Both bent forward in their seats to listen.

'Well, what is it?' said the younger man.

'Might be anything,' said his friend. 'A

Rachael weeping for her children, a Job amongst his ashes for his sickness, they lament aloud for most things. These voices in the night are—oh, I say, do you see how well that term expresses what I have been telling you of? I must make a note of it. Title for a lecture on deputation work, eh?—But what was I going to tell you about these night-voices? Oh, well, never mind. Shall we go to see what is wrong?'

And to the accompaniment of the continued mourning they stepped down on to the moon-lit path and through the gate.

CHAPTER XIII.

'TWIXT NIGHT AND DAY.

(FOUNDED ON FACT.)

AMI ONGU also rejoiced in the name of Joseph. That was because the new teacher, come to their town, some forty-five miles from Bende, was, if no particular scholar, at least a Biblical enthusiast. Hence the church, by his zeal established, numbered among its members all the apostles, such of the prophets as an Ibo may easily pronounce and remember, and not a few of the patriarchs of the Israelite history.

Joseph, taking after his famous namesake, was a dreamer of dreams. Indeed his whole movements and appearance betrayed him. Rarely were his eyes seen open to their full

extent, yet more rarely had he been known to perform any action at a more undignified rate of speed than did his neighbour. But withal Joseph was devout, though ignorant, and a firm believer in the spiritual significance of his many visions, wherein again he did not err from the great patriarch's example.

It befell that on a night in December at about Christmas time, Joseph lay sleeping with his brother on the narrow bamboo settle which did duty as a bed. Perhaps it could better be called a bunk, for in that town they built their bedrooms of the dimensions of a ship's cabin—without the porthole—and arranged the bamboo beds one above the other. Joseph's brother was given to noisy snoring of nights. How much influence this may have had on Joseph's dreaming habits we may not know. At least that night Joseph dreamed a dreadful dream.

A noisy scraping of the bad-fitting door upon its hinges betrayed a visitor, and with the visitor a bright and eerie light shone into the pitch darkness of the tiny room. From his bed

Joseph looked and saw the most ravishing vision his eyes had ever beheld. Pale, white as the marsh lilies in the swamp, glowing with inner light like the fireflies among the trees, more beautiful for form than the gaudy Roman Catholic prints of Christ in the outer room, the face of a white man literally shone amidst the gloom. For the rest of his body Joseph could see nothing but a filmy glistening of white raiment. He could not, dared not, speak. He could only fasten wondering eyes upon the vision.

Slowly the face advanced into the room and sought out the bed. The heart of the negro almost stopped as he found himself gazing into blue eyes far brighter and deeper than those of the local government man. For such white men as he had met were few, and to him the types of all. He strove to avoid that gaze, but no more could turn from it than can the bush-deer from the python's fascinating glare. It pinned his head, as it were, upon the wooden bolster. He found himself unable to move.

Thus they gazed at one another for a minute or so, and then the visitor spoke.

'Rise, O Joseph!' he said, and Joseph was powerless to refuse. He rose and tearing himself from the fascinating eyes bowed his head to the earthen floor.

'Rise, O Joseph!' commanded the voice again, and once more Joseph felt himself obeying almost without volition of his own.

Calmly the awful eyes contemplated him. 'Joseph,' said the voice, and to Joseph it sounded sweeter than the singing he had heard from the district commissioner's gramophone, when once that official stayed a night or two in the town. And yet it contained a solemn menace, like distant tornado thunder. 'I am commanded to tell you that before the New Year comes in this church must buy a bell for calling the people together for service. If not, then one of you shall die before its first day be gone. Hear the word!'

At last Joseph found his tongue. His lips were sticky with perspiration. With a gulp-

ing, quivering, awe-stricken voice he begged to be told who his visitor might be.

'I am a messenger of Chileke, the Almighty God of Heaven. Obey His word!'

In a moment he was gone, and Joseph lay awake listening to the snoring of his brother. He quivered and shook with fright until the very bed supports rattled in their sockets in the walls. Never before had he dreamed on this wise, so plainly, so vividly. He simply dared not look towards the door lest that enlightened face, with its marvellous eyes, should be there. He buried his own face in his arm and gave himself up to his terror. Three times he wailed aloud, but even the sound of his own voice frightened him worse. He yielded himself to a panic of horror, rolling and tossing until his brother awoke. He would have relieved himself to him, but that young man was still a heathen. Joseph waited for him to fall asleep again.

Never for a moment did he doubt the absolute certainty of the dream's accomplishment.

'RISE, O, JOSEPH!' HE SAID, AND JOSEPH WAS POWERLESS TO REFUSE

As well might the thorn bear grapes, and the thistle figs. Though now like a 'tree planted by the river of waters,' none the less the wood of the parent stock was in him. The roots of his mind struck back yet, some of them, into the ground of ideas common to his people. And the most mighty idea of all that compounded the strange loam out of which sprang the huge spreading tree of native religious life was that of the essential mystery of all appearances. The innate knowledge that flesh veiled the soul made them attribute a soul to all strange things. The stranger the outer appearance the more powerful the soul, or devil, or in white man's talk, ju-ju. There was no accident in life, not even a dream. Chance was as little supposed as scientific explanation. Even so easily explainable an accident as a broken river or waterfall was the direct act of ju-ju. The whole world swarmed with a mighty population of unseen spirits which did uncouth acts upon men, even to the giving of

them dreams, nightmares being caused by a specially maglignant foe.

Strange indeed if some of this were not carried over unconsciously into Joseph's new life. While he abandoned the tales of abounding devils, he still adhered to a certain belief in the ill or good results of certain deeds, much as an English housewife dreads a broken mirror or spilled salt. To him there was not the slightest doubt at all of the dread import of his dream.

Miserable indeed was the Christmas those good folk spent. It was in the morning prayers of that day that Joseph rose to his feet and told his tale. Consternation seized upon the little band. For a few minutes they sat astounded. They never dreamt of doubting either the dream or the plain warning of it. They also, like Joseph, had been bred in an atmosphere which for thousands of years had seemed impregnated with mysteries unfathomable. Had the warning been that the sky

should fall they would not even then have doubted.

Then up rose Jeremiah, and addressed his brethren. Jeremiah had no spiritual affinity with the great prophet. He was the practical man of the church, the man who would fain be doing something rather than sit and brood. His advice was that a deputation of their number should forthwith set out to the missionary to inform him of these things. The idea met with general acclamation. Volunteers began to offer themselves for the ninety-mile tramp to Bende and back that it involved.

But a new difficulty arose. Simon, a lad well used to the road, who had frequently been at the mission house, brought it forward.

'I make you to know,' he said, 'that I have been at mission house many times, but I never saw any bell in that house. If any school or church wishes to buy bell, the white man bids them to wait until he receives it from his country. But, look, we have but seven days to the

New Year. Shall we not do better to collect the money and buy for ourselves at Azakoli?'

Not one voice was raised to suggest that the white man would pay no heed to the dream. It was incredible that any could disbelieve or disobey the warning. Not every church was so warned with such unquestionable directness by the messenger of God. The white man would be as concerned as themselves. Truly there was wisdom in Simon's words. They must buy a bell at once at the nearest possible place.

With painful effort the teacher drew up a list of subscribers, heading it:—

'These the names of him that put money to my church bell, Sir.'

The church happened to be very poor, and the utmost efforts, although some sold all that they could spare of the year's farming-stock of yams, though more than one young man postponed his usual payment of dowry thus putting off his wedding-day at least three or

four months, only produced the sum of three pounds, seventeen shillings, mostly in cowries. There were two gin-cases full of them, and it took three men most of the night counting and checking them.

It was far to Azakoli market, the best part of forty miles. It was early, therefore, in the morning of Boxing Day, that the deputation set forth, four young men, two of them bearing cowries, and another a bundle of brass and copper rods. The whole of the members turned out to see them off, and even accompanied them some distance on the road, and then gave them a noisy good-bye and bade them return in haste.

Simon led the way because he was accounted the best dressed, having a pair of white man's trousers much gone at the knees, a black singlet, and an engineer's peaked cap. Behind him trudged Jeremiah, Reuben, and Peter, in their very best go-to-meeting garments. All day they plodded over the rock roads whose stones jabbed and bruised the soles of their

feet, hardened as they were. The sun rose high above them, pouring down heat that rose back from the rock path like the stifling breath of a furnace. Perspiration streamed from them at every pore until they stripped off superfluous garments and walked with the barest covering round the loins. Still they halted not, save about mid-day at a clear stream, four and twenty miles from their town. At nightfall they strode, tired out, into Azakoli, and sought the house of a friend.

Two days passed before they heard of a bell for sale, and yet three more they chaffered and bargained. Six pounds was being asked for it and three pound seventeen, mostly in cowries, was all they had. The black trader was adamant the first day. No whit would he abate his price, although they sprang their first offer of two pounds up to two pounds ten. The second day he softened his demand to five pounds, and they rose to three. On the third day they bluntly showed him all they had, and

towards evening the trader seeing no more could be got from them, gave in.

Not one moment did they wait. Wise with a cunning learned of much marketing they hastened away at once lest the black trader should repent and demand the bell again. By night they had put six miles behind them. All next day they tramped on towards their town, practical Jeremiah enlivening the road with cheery shouts and songs. Every half-hour one or other would seize the bell and try its tone, and laugh with glee to hear it ring. Then they would fall to discussing their bargain and repeat again the arguments they had used in the dealer's shed.

At four o'clock they stalked silently into the town. One of the members happened to meet them.

'You get bell?' he asked, eagerly.

'Ee,' they assented and took it out of the box to show. Such a tiny bell it was, not bigger than a railway porter's, and with a

piece chipped out of the brim at that. It might have cost ten shillings in England, but certainly not more. But they were prouder of that bell than Westminster of Big Ben. As they marched along the path the whole town, pagan and Christian alike, turned out to marvel and to talk.

Already its cokernut pole belfry was in position outside the little mud church. With shouts of laughter and of wonder they hung it in its place. That very night it rang for the first time calling the people to the evening prayers.

Meanwhile Joseph the dreamer looked solemnly on. What were the thoughts behind those half-closed eyes no man knew. And *now* no man cared.

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